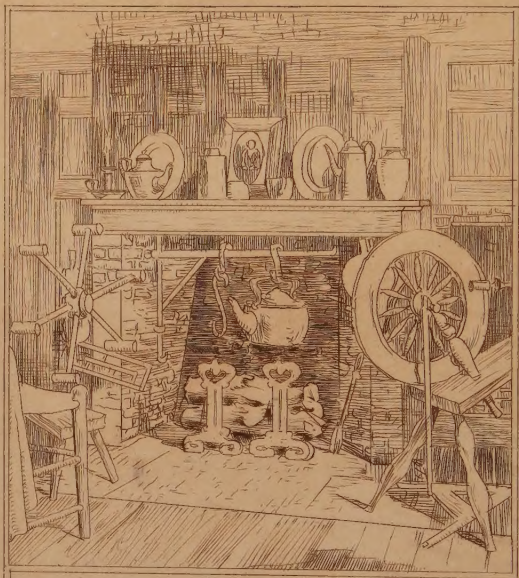

·MARY EVANS·

Mary Evans.

WOMEN OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

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OF

THE NEW TESTAMENT

BY

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PREFACE

ALTHOUGH this volume appears in the series which contains Dr. Horton's beautiful studies of the women of the Old Testament, I desire to state that it is not my aim to attempt a sequel to that delightful work. Fortunately any such ambitious design is precluded by the entire change of situation and atmosphere which comes in with the dawning of the Christian era. Those old-world stories of patriarchal times, familiar to us from our childhood, yet ever fresh and abounding in vivid details, demand a dramatic treatment and a picturesque setting. It is fortunate when they fall to the pen of a writer whose imaginative skill is adequate to the task of setting them out in their variegated hues.

When we pass on to the New Testament we find that although women still play an important part in the history, the scenes among which they move, and the style of narrative in which these are described, are of an entirely different character. For the most part we have but the most meagre hints concerning the characters and doings of the women of the gospel and apostolic times. We have to

grope our way among hints and allusions. On the other hand, what we miss through this deficiency of information may be amply compensated for by the fact that we are to pursue our inquiries concerning people most of whom came into direct relations with Jesus Christ—saw His face, heard His voice, felt His healing touch. What would not any of us give to possess a tithe of their experience? A halo of companionship with the Saviour encircles most of these women of the New Testament; and nearly all the others stand in the light of the afterglow that lingers throughout the apostolic period. To myself this is the fascination of the subject. I wish I could help my readers to share in it.

W. F. A.

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WOMEN OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

CHAPTER I

Mary the Mother of Jesus—Blessed among Women

WHEN we escape from the weary labyrinth of legend that the fancy of centuries has woven round the name of Mary, and resolutely confine our attention to those traits of her character that are indicated in the gospel records, we may suffer some disappointment at discovering how few and faint they are. Compared with the picture of Jesus that comes to us down the ages, still vivid in its convincing realism, the New Testament portrait of the Virgin is but a dim shadow, flitting across the page for a moment here and there, and then fading away into total obscurity. So marked is this contrast that we are almost tempted to suspect a deliberate design on the part of the evangelists to reduce the mother to relative insignificance in the presence of her Divine Son. And yet the narratives are too artless to admit of any such subtlety. The simpler explanation is that this slightness of texture is itself a note of genuine portraiture; for the reason that Mary was of a retiring nature, unobtrusive, reticent, perhaps even shrinking from observation, so that the impress of her personality was confined to the sweet sanctities of the home circle. That she was a woman without character,

feeble and featureless, one of those limp beings who come to be reckoned as cyphers in the world, is not for a moment to be supposed. On the rare occasions when the curtain is lifted we catch glimpses of a character not wanting in energy and power of initiation. Have we not all met with people who make their individuality felt within a very limited circle, while beyond that even their existence is scarcely noticed? The few hints that the evangelists have permitted themselves to let fall about the mother of Jesus seem to point in this direction.

Although all four evangelists contribute materials for our meagre knowledge of Mary, it is St. Luke who supplies us with most of the information on which we have to depend in endeavouring to form some idea of what she was like. He and St. Matthew are the only evangelists who give us any account of the birth and infancy of our Lord; and here the narrative in the third gospel is both more full and more definite than that in the first.

It must be confessed that these scenes of the Annunciation, the Nativity, the Infancy, beautiful as they are with a rare charm of idyllic grace, affect us also with a sense of idyllic remoteness. They do not move in the plane of our dull prosaic lives. It gives us a shock of incongruity to imagine the Bethlehem shepherds among our Sussex or Dorset farm servants. We would sooner look for them on the "Immortal Dreamer's" Delectable Mountains than among any downs or sheep-runs we are acquainted with. But is not this feeling only a sign of the limitation of our imaginations and the dulness of our spirits? Who can tell what visions and voices might be perceptible even now to keener eyes and sharper ears than ours? It is, indeed, somewhat daring to assert that man is the only spiritual being in the universe, or that on no occasion has he been brought into contact with other spiritual beings. Of course this is ultimately a question of evidence; but in the estimation of the evidence account must be taken of

religious ideas as well as of the factors that are concerned with ordinary historical probability; for it must be remembered that the wonders here related are in immediate connection with the coming of the Son of God for the redemption of the world. We must not forget that these scenes do not stand by themselves as isolated marvels suddenly cropping up in the course of ordinary events, a few rare flowers of paradise breaking out in a desert of earthly things. If they appear as exotics, it is to be observed that they form the border, as we might say, of a whole garden of wonders, such as never spring up in the fields we tread to-day. They are but the prelude to a history that abounds with superhuman marvels.

Still, even when compared with the subsequent narrative of the life of Christ, these scenes seem to dwell in an atmosphere even further removed from that of our daily life. Not only to those who half suspect that a fond fancy has in some degree clothed the poetry of the spirit with images more comprehensible to the average man—especially in the East, where all thought assumes concrete forms—but also to people who fully accept these accounts in their literal meaning as statements of solid facts of history, it is difficult to sympathise with the human interests, with the flesh and blood life, that such unearthly scenes should still be thought to contain. In any case we need a strong effort of the imagination to do this. But if the scenes are unearthly Mary is not unearthly; and if we are to understand her at all we must think of her as a woman, possessing a woman's gifts and graces, subject to a woman's limitations and frailties, her natural alarms, hopes, pains, joys; a woman with the warm, palpitating emotions of human nature stirring in her breast.

She first meets us at a time when she can scarcely have crossed the threshold of womanhood. Marriage is early in the East; and a Jewish maiden still only betrothed and looking forward to her wedding as an event of the future

must be very young, a girl hardly full grown. To this child, brought up in a peasant's home, accustomed to the little round of daily duties that is the lot of the daughters of the poor, wholly ignorant of the great world and its ways, there comes the most startling and overwhelming revelation. She is to be the mother of the promised Redeemer of her people! Her first thoughts could not but be full of bewilderment and dismay. The hope and the terror of expectant motherhood are upon her!

Painters of various schools have given us their several interpretations of the Annunciation, but perhaps none have seized upon the purely human aspect of the scene so evidently as Rossetti. It may be said that the nineteenth-century pre-Raffaelite artist cannot emancipate himself from the age in which he lives, and in spite of his archaic sympathies is still essentially modern in thought, so that the expression of his Madonna is also distinctly modern. And yet it is only modern in the sense that it is frankly human. Rossetti tells what the old painters with a fine reticence concealed. To them the Divine glory of Gabriel's message extinguished all earthly considerations in its ineffable splendour. To us the study of the Nazareth maiden in this crisis when she suddenly passes from girlhood to womanhood in its most profound significance cannot but be of primary interest. We want to know how it affected her girlish consciousness; and Rossetti, who, if not exactly a theologian, is a poetic interpreter of human life, clearly answers that question. Mary shrinks from the splendid angel, almost cowers at his feet; but not because she is dazzled by the coming into her presence of one of his lofty estate, for she fixes her eyes upon him in a steadfast gaze. Those dark eyes have in them the terror of the hunted deer. It is not Gabriel, it is his overwhelming message, that smites her with alarm. Her maiden modesty is troubled. There is nothing of the joyous gratitude of the *Magnificat* in the picture. And yet is not this just such

an attitude as would be natural to the startled innocence of a peasant girl?

Wonder and alarm are Mary's most natural feelings at the moment when the amazing truth dawns upon her. But as she gathers assurance she bows in quiet submission. This is the evangelist's conclusion. Mary is the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to her as His messenger has said. As yet there is no word of joy, no note of exultation, no sign of triumph. The trembling girl simply accepts the tremendous fact as the will of her Lord.

The next scene to which St. Luke introduces us is of a very different character. At the first announcement of her own destiny Mary had asked how such a wonder could be; and Gabriel had encouraged her faith by telling her of another though a lesser wonder. A kinswoman, Elizabeth, away in the hill-country of the South, long married and long childless, is also to be blessed by becoming a mother. Forthwith Mary sets out to visit her kinswoman. We may be surprised that a young maiden should be permitted to take so serious a journey, one of several days, all the way from Galilee to the farther regions of Judæa, especially in the interval between betrothal and marriage which oriental etiquette always requires to be a time of the greatest seclusion. It may be remarked that St. Luke must have known this custom at least as well as we know it—and his informant also; and yet the statement is made unhesitatingly. Force of circumstances always gives to women of the humbler ranks of society a freedom that is denied to their more fashionable sisters; but apart from that fact it may be observed that the Jews never placed their wives and daughters in the degrading and cruel position of jealous slavery that is prevalent in Mohammedan countries. And yet we can scarcely think of this young girl taking such a journey wholly unprotected. Where was Joseph's chivalry to permit such a thing? But on the other hand we are not told that this was the case. The Evangelist never

stops to amuse our curiosity with those picturesque details that the "Special Correspondent" lays himself out to supply.

By whatever means Mary was enabled to make her journey in safety, it is clearly St. Luke's meaning that she undertook it of her own initiative; and that was remarkable enough for one in her position. Here then we come upon an early hint that the mother of our Lord was a woman of energy and will. Other hints to the same effect will emerge as we proceed.

St. Luke's picture of the meeting of the two expectant mothers is as remarkable for its portraiture of the hostess as for that of her guest; but it is with the latter that we are now concerned. The elder woman's enthusiastic welcome stirs the soul of the young girl and gives her courage and hope. Had she not yet breathed her fearful secret to any trusted confidant? Had she not even told her mother? Or was her mother not living? We know she had a sister.[1] Were the sweet whispered confidences of maiden sisterhood impossible to her in this case, so strange, so utterly unique? We cannot tell. That she should not be represented as conferring with her future husband with regard to such a matter as that which now filled her heart with fear and hope is only reasonable; and St. Matthew tells us that Joseph got his information through other channels.[2] It looks as though she had kept her incomprehensible secret deep buried in her bosom till it was drawn out by her warm-hearted kinswoman. Mary, we see, is naturally reticent; but it is just the reticent nature that hungers most keenly for the sympathy it is so reluctant to invite; and when the sealed fountain is broken the stream gushes out all the more freely for the fact that it has long been pent up in a painful oppression.

In response to Elizabeth's glad and generous words Mary breaks through all reserve. They are just what she needs to cheer her in the loneliness of her situation, and

[1] *John* xix. 25. [2] *Matt.* i. 18–21.

her whole nature now makes a rebound from the attitude of submissive fear in which we left her before to a state of exultant gratitude. No longer oppressed by the terrible idea of her coming motherhood, she kindles with joy and praise at the thought of her high privilege. It is when the mother thinks of her child that she forgets herself, or, if still thinking of her own fate at all, forgets her alarms and glories in the gift of a life that is to be hers to love and cherish. But Mary's case is not that of simple motherhood, most beautiful and divine of human experiences though it be; for she is to be the mother of the Christ, the Holy One of God! And this is the thought in which she now exults.

The *Magnificat* has come down to us as Mary's expression of exultation in answer to Elizabeth's greeting. Now it has been objected that it is unreasonable to imagine a young girl, when meeting one of her relations under the circumstances here described, composing such a hymn as this, there and then, on the spur of the moment. And it has been suggested that even if Mary were a poetess this composition is out of harmony with the situation; that her lyric muse would not have prompted a psalm of so liturgical a character, one more fitted for the public worship of the sanctuary than for the private confidences of two women in the home. Moreover, we are reminded, these early chapters of St. Luke abound in hymns. The Bethlehem Angels, Zacharias the priest, Simeon the old man in the temple, all burst into song, all utter themselves in poetry. This is not even dramatic poetry. It is lyric, and in the case of the *Magnificat*, at least, not after the type of the simple, thrush-like song that would be the vehicle of personal feeling, but in the form of the spacious ode that might befit the emotions of a multitude on some great public occasion. This grand poem requires the organ rather than the lute as its fitting accompaniment.

On the other hand, it has been pointed out that the *Magnificat* is almost entirely constructed of phrases culled

out of the Old Testament, being moulded especially on the *Song of Hanna*[1]—itself a poem appearing under very similar circumstances; and further that Mary was just in the circumstances which would inspire the most exalted form of poetry. We are reminded, too, that the people of the South and East are much more ready with impromptu poetry than the more phlegmatic folk of the West. Travellers who have lived among the Arabs tell of their almost miraculous gifts of improvisation.

This must be allowed; and it should check a rash conclusion based only on our experience of English domestic life.

Nevertheless these considerations do not entirely dispose of what has been said against the notion that we have here just the very words that a shorthand reporter would have been able to take down in his note-book had he been present at the meeting of the two kinswomen. We know that ancient historians, even when most anxious to give a true impression of what actually occurred, permit themselves great freedom in rendering the speeches of the leading characters of their narratives, and indeed do so in order the more clearly to bring out what they conceive to be the true thoughts of these people. If, then, any readers of St. Luke should seem driven to the conclusion that the Evangelist employs hymns composed more deliberately to express the thoughts and feelings of the people whom he is describing in this early part of his gospel, he should not be thought the less intent upon a serious historical recital. It is to be observed that we have no indications of this method when we come to the sayings of Jesus, where the fidelity of the disciple to his Master is always preserved.

In any case, it should be admitted, that although the *Magnificat* gradually glides into utterances of a general character that do not seem to have any immediate bearing on its occasion, the spirit and temper of it finely agree

[1] 1 *Sam.* ii. 1–10.

with what we may well believe to have been the feelings of Mary when meeting Elizabeth. It is to be noticed that there is nothing here that might not have been in the mind of a Jewess before the time of Christ. There is not the faintest reflection of New Testament thought; as has been already said, the poem is entirely moulded on the Old Testament. Plainly it is not the work of a Christian. Certainly St. Luke did not compose it. His style is of good Greek; this poem is intensely Hebraistic. So far it fits into the time in the history where it occurs. Then, it may be remarked, the Scriptures on which it is based are for the most part Psalms, next to the Law the most familiar portions of the Jewish Bible, as they are also the most devotional. Further, the prevailing tone of the poem is one of joyous, exultant gratitude. This perfectly expresses the new mood into which Mary has now passed, the gladness and thankfulness she experiences in contemplating the unspeakable privilege God has placed upon her. At the same time there is a full confession of lowliness. Here we reach the central point round which the whole movement revolves. God has looked on the low estate of His handmaiden. The thought indeed takes a general form. The proud are scattered, princes dethroned, the rich sent empty away; while they of low degree are exalted, the hungry filled, and His servant Israel helped by God. The conclusion would seem to suit Esther in her triumph over Hanan, the enemy of her people, more fitly than Mary at her meeting with her kinswoman Elizabeth. This, however, is the climax in which the dominant theme is worked out to its grand conclusion. It starts from Mary's position. For it is indeed wonderful that an honour, which any princess in the king's court might covet beyond all things, has fallen to the lot of this lowly maid from a Galilean peasant's cottage.

The well-known incidents connected with the birth and infancy of Jesus that are narrated in the first and third gospels do not throw much light on the character of His

mother, though as we muse on them to our imagination there rises the picture of a gentle, loving woman, devoted to her wonderful Babe, awed before the dawning mystery of His nature. With St. Luke as our guide we follow Mary and her patient, loyal husband from their highland home in the north to the royal city of David. Although both the genealogies appear to give the descent of Joseph, there is good reason to believe that he had followed the custom of his people, and married in his own tribe of Judah. The unhesitating way in which the two evangelists who assert the virgin birth of our Lord also treat Him as the Son of David shows that they both held his mother to have been of the royal lineage. If there had been any doubt about this, we may be sure the question would have been raised by the Jews as soon as the miraculous conception was declared, whenever this may have been, since the denial of it would have been fatal to the Messianic claim.

At Bethlehem, in the home of her ancestors, the crowded *khan* affords no room for one who, by right of descent, should have been in the usurper Herod's palace at Jerusalem; and it is necessary for her, in the supreme hour of her need, to take shelter among the stalls of the cattle. It is not unreasonable to give credence to the picturesque tradition that this was a cave, for the statement is found as early as Justin Martyr (about A.D. 150),[1] and it seems to have been in the *Gospel according to the Hebrews*,[2] an apocryphal, but still a very ancient book, unfortunately now lost. Caves abound in the limestone hills of Judæa, and in the present day we may see them used for the stabling of animals, and even as parts of houses that are built against them. Probably the young mother would have more quiet and seclusion in such a retreat than would have been possible among the rough travellers, hucksters and others, who thronged the arcades of the comfortless inn.

Here the first terrible experience of motherhood came

[1] *Tryph.* 78. [2] *Con. Celsus*, i. 51.

upon Mary, and then doubtless at the birth of her first-born that moment of sudden revulsion from agony to unspeakable gladness which the true mother reckons to be more than compensation for all she has endured. The wonderful Babe lay in the manger, as helpless as any other babe; and St. Luke is careful to tell us that His mother bound Him in those tight bandages that Eastern people use to this day, with the belief that they support the feeble infant frame, and which certainly add to its look of helplessness and dependence. That the Christ should be thus dependent on Mary was a unique privilege for this one woman. And yet does not His teaching suggest that every mother who ministers loving care to her infant, with thoughts of the Bethlehem Babe, and with the tenderness and reverence she would have shown to Him, is really ministering to Jesus Himself?

While in Bethlehem Mary receives the visit of the Shepherds; and at this point St. Luke flashes a rare ray of light on her inner life. He tells us that "Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart."[1] As He makes a similar remark a second time, at the finding of Jesus in the Temple,[2] it is clearly intended to be significant. It seems to hint that Mary's carefully treasured memories were the original sources of these narratives, and that they are to be relied on because she had guarded them well, and thought much over them. At the same time it suggests an explanation for the fact that they were not divulged early enough to find a place in the primitive accounts of the life of Christ, St. Mark's in particular.

Mary appears in both these scenes as of a deeply meditative nature, remembering, thinking. And yet what fond mother does not treasure up every incident concerning the infancy of her child? Things that may seem trivial to the outside world are to her charged with the deepest meaning, prophetic of the most astounding future. We smile at the

[1] *Luke* ii. 19. [2] *Ibid.* ii. 51.

illusion. Yet there is more truth in it than in our worldly moods we will allow, for there is a Christ in every little child, and

"Heaven lies about us in our infancy."

Alas, that the child's own wilful conduct when he comes to years of choice too often dispels the mother's dream! But this mournful destiny of fond motherhood was not to be Mary's. By a strange way of thinking that we can scarcely follow, the experience of motherhood, which St. Paul has described as the mystical means for the saving of woman,[1] and which we have come to regard as something like her coronation, was held by the Jews to unfit her for the Holy Presence; so that one who had recently become a mother was required to offer a sacrifice of ceremonial purification. Some have thought that when St. Paul writes of child-bearing as the means by which woman is saved, he is referring specifically to the birth of Jesus. Be that as it may, since Christ has come into the world the formal conceptions of Old Testament ritual are abolished; and the significance of the revolution as it touches woman is seen in the fact that with the Christian a Thanksgiving in public worship takes the place of the Jewish ceremony of Purification. But Mary is a Jewess under the law, and she must observe the customs of her people.

In his account of the visit to the temple, St. Luke drops a hint of the poverty of the Nazareth household. The law required the offering of a lamb by a mother on the occasion of the birth of her child;[2] but if she could not afford that she might bring two turtle-doves or two young pigeons.[3] St. Luke shows that Mary had to take advantage of this concession and content herself with a poor woman's offering.

The Purification of the mother was followed by the Presentation of the child. Then it was that the aged Simeon took the infant Christ in his arms. That must

[1] 1 *Tim.* ii. 15. [2] *Lev.* xii. 6. [3] *Ibid.* xii. 8.

have been a joy to the mother, especially since the touching words of the *Nunc Dimittis*, expressing the old man's joy and gratitude, suggest that his prophetic insight came to the aid of Mary's faith. But to her he added a word of startling and ominous meaning. After predicting the revolutionary effect of the coming of this child to Israel, as an occasion of falling and of rising up for many, he warned her that a sword would pierce her own soul. It is not the common word for sword that is here employed by St. Luke, but one that was used originally for the long Thracian pike, and when applied to a sword at all it indicated a weapon of an exceptionally large make. A terrible thrust is suggested by the selection of this unusual word.

The ingenuity of interpreters in all ages has been exercised in endeavouring to discover the significance of this enigmatic expression of Simeon's. Thus, by the early Fathers it was referred to the pang of unbelief that they supposed to have pierced the heart of Mary at the sight of her Son's death. Recent commentators have generally explained it with reference to her agony endured while witnessing the sufferings of Jesus on the cross. This is a more natural interpretation; and yet perhaps it would be wiser not to limit the words to any such definite occasion. We have no reason to suppose that Simeon had a distinct prevision of the crucifixion. Knowing the degraded state of the nation, and perceiving that this Infant in the temple was to be the long expected Deliverer, the inspired man saw what none of the disciples would permit themselves to see, even after living long in the companionship of their Lord, that the true redemption could only come in a way that would mean agony to the mother of the Redeemer.

CHAPTER II

Mater Dolorosa—Sorrow with Blessedness

SIMEON holding the infant Christ in his arms had turned to the glad mother, and startled her by declaring, in the inspiration of a sudden prophetic insight, that through this child there would come to her anguish such as could only be compared to the thrust of a great sword or rude Thracian pike. Amazed as she must have been at the totally unexpected announcement of so doleful a destiny, Mary had many foreshadowings of it in subsequent years before the horror pierced her in its extreme cruelty. Following the few hints that are dropped by the evangelists, themselves intent on quite another subject, we discover that *every time Mary appears in the history of her Son it is to receive some thrust of pain.*

The one scene from the boyhood of Jesus that has been preserved for us by a single evangelist affords an instance of this distress in its mildest form. It will become more and more acute as we proceed. There was a perfectly natural occasion of anxiety for Mary and Joseph in the discovery, at the end of the first day's journey on the road down from Jerusalem, that their child was not as they had supposed among their friends in the troop of returning pilgrims. Still He was twelve years of age, and a score of trivial chances might have occasioned the separation. Very likely maternal anxiety would be unreasonably swift to imagine some serious disaster; that would be only natural, only what any mother might have felt under similar circumstances. No doubt the weariness of a long and fruitless search among the crowded streets and bazaars

of the noisy city must have deepened the sense of a vague foreboding that something very terrible had happened, and with it a keen feeling of self-reproach for not having looked more carefully for the child before leaving. This too we must regard as in no way unique, except indeed in so far as the charge of One of whom Mary knew at least in some degree the nature and destiny must have given rise to an exceptional sense of responsibility. It is not here that we come upon Mary's peculiar and characteristic distress. That appears at the interview between mother and Son when He is found among the temple rabbis.

Mary addresses her Boy with some irritation of manner. Had He forgotten His parents? Would He not have imagined that they must have been anxious about Him during this long and unaccountable separation? Her feeling is perfectly explicable, most natural. The position of affairs did seem to be very provoking. Distressed, wearied, hot and flustered, after hours of vain searching, Mary suddenly coming upon Jesus finds Him in no corresponding alarm at being lost, apparently not even aware that He has been missed, certainly quite oblivious of the trouble His absence has occasioned. How could He have acted in this way, He who of all children had been the example of submission to parents? Yes, it was natural that for the moment the poor mother should feel some annoyance.

And yet her Son's striking answer must have conveyed to her a rebuke. We cannot suppose that Jesus intended anything of the kind. He was far too dutiful a son to be found taking upon Him the part of Mentor to His mother. We should do a great wrong to our idea of the Perfect Child if we credited Him with conduct which in any other boy of twelve years would be justly designated priggish. Most assuredly He spoke in absolute simplicity—"Did you not know that I must be in My Father's house?" He had not imagined that they would search the whole city before looking for Him in the temple. He had assumed that if they

had wanted Him this was the first place where they would have looked for Him, because it was the most natural thing in the world that He should be there. What more likely place is there in which to find a child than his father's house?

But if this was all that He meant—an utterance of pure surprise expressed in the absolute simplicity of innocent childhood—to Mary it must have been pregnant with painful significance. His Father's house! Then He was conscious of a higher claim than that of His mother. He was drawn to duties and occupations that would carry Him into regions far beyond the little circle of homely interests to which apparently hitherto all His life had been confined. Was she to lose Him in a much more real and permanent way than she had supposed while He had been only a day or two out of her sight?

At that innocent saying of His, spoken in the simplicity of childhood, Mary felt the first chill approach of the terrible sword which was to pierce her to the heart in the later years. Here was something for her to ponder over; and at this point St. Luke repeats his significant statement, that "Mary kept all these sayings in her heart."[1] Yet he is careful to tell us that Jesus still remained "subject to His parents."

The next occasion on which Mary appears is only mentioned in the fourth gospel; but there the narrative is given with a fulness of detail that proclaims the eye-witness. This is the narrative of the marriage at Cana in Galilee. From the way in which St. John introduces Mary in the first instance, and then adds that "Jesus *also* was bidden, and His disciples,"[2] it would appear that His mother may have been present as a near relative of the bridegroom to assist in the arrangements of the feast. The absence of any reference to Joseph, now and henceforth, leads us to the inference that he must have died before this time. Mary, then, is a widow. She has

[1] *Luke* ii. 51. [2] *John* ii. 1, 2.

suffered the loss of a kind and considerate husband. What that meant to her only they who have felt the awful wrench of the separation, and faced the blankness of the long dreary years that follow, can understand; and they will understand it so perfectly that no comments are needed to make it more clear.

It has been suggested that possibly Mary had removed to Cana after the death of her husband, or when her Son had gone away to join the disciples of John by the Jordan. This would account for her being at the wedding. If Cana of Galilee was the place now known as *Kefr Kenna*—and the identification is generally admitted to be probable—Mary would only have to go some six or seven miles over the hill to the north-east of Nazareth to reach the spot where the houses of this little town are pleasantly grouped on the slope in terraces, one above another. In any case she might well be known in so near a place, and have friends there.

Mary's appeal to Jesus when she heard of the wine running short is an indication of the relation that had grown up between her and her Son. It shows that she had learnt to look to Him in times of perplexity. Since she had lost her husband, her First-born was now her natural support and comfort. Instinctively the habit of the home life asserts itself. Her wise, strong Son has often helped her in moments of anxiety; surely He will find some way out of the present difficulty in which her friends are placed. That she actually anticipated a miracle is hardly to be supposed. The apocryphal stories of wonders wrought in His childhood, some of them grotesque, some repulsive, are evidently false; and St. John expressly tells us that this miracle at Cana was the first He wrought. What we are to imagine is rather that Mary appealed indefinitely to her Son, without the least idea as to what He might do, simply confiding in the wisdom and kindness of which He must have given

evidence on many occasions during their quiet life at Nazareth.

The answer Mary received from Jesus cannot but strike us at a superficial reading of it as unaccountably harsh. But his language would not have made this impression on a contemporary. The address, "Woman," which would be unpardonably offensive if used by a son in speaking to his mother in England to-day, was not considered in any way ungracious or inappropriate among the Jews. Jesus used the same word in His affectionate farewell on the cross while committing His mother to the charge of St. John, at a moment when none but the tenderest feelings could have been in his heart.[1] Then the words, "What have I to do with thee?" have a tone of rudeness to us which is entirely absent in the original, the Aramaic in which Jesus would have spoken. The phrase is a Hebrew idiom, difficult to translate into English. Jephthah uses it in his message to the king of the Ammonites,[2] David in speaking to the sons of Zeruiah,[3] the Sidonian woman in addressing Elijah,[4] Elisha to the king of Israel,[5] demoniacs addressing Jesus.[6] Plainly it was quite a familiar form of speech adopted in a great variety of circumstances.

And yet when all has been said that can be said to mitigate the severity of these words, they convey a painful impression. Jesus clearly implies, though with no unkindness of manner, that He cannot permit His course to be directed by any influence short of the Divine—not even His mother's. His times are in His Father's hands. No interference from any, even the nearest and dearest human authority, can be admitted. Think what that must have meant to Mary. She was losing her Son. It is one of the difficulties of parents to discover that the authority they are accustomed to exert over their children cannot be

[1] *John* xix. 26.
[2] *Judges* xi. 12.
[3] 2 *Sam.* xix. 22.
[4] 1 *Kings* xvii. 18
[5] 2 *Kings* iii. 13.
[6] *Matt.* viii. 29; *Mark* i. 24.

maintained indefinitely; that there must come a time when the children claim liberty, and justly claim it; that the son or daughter who has attained to adult age is right in taking up the responsibilities of an individual conscience, and gently declining any interference with the law of that august ruler within. But in the case before us the shock was the stronger for the perfect obedience which Jesus had shown in His boyhood, and which may have been unconsciously taken advantage of in later years by Mary for the undue assertion of her will. And then this was a very marked step towards a region of independence which must be His alone, and whither she could not follow Him even in thought. That must have been a moment of painful forebodings for Mary when she heard her Son's unexpected words. It is not to be forgotten that His action met her anxiety and allayed it more effectually than she could have hoped. Still she would have been more than a woman if she had accepted this as an adequate compensation for the loss of her old authority.

When we return to the account given in the earlier gospels the next scene in which Mary appears is at Capernaum, where she appears to be living now, perhaps with Jesus, but also with her younger sons, while her daughters are still at Nazareth,[1] probably married and in homes of their own. Jesus is now in the thick of His most continuous and exhausting work. So great is the strain on Him—pressed on all sides by an eager, selfish crowd, the sick continually appealing to Him for the help of His healing, His disciples needing careful training, the multitude hanging on His utterances in great assemblies gathered by the sea-shore, the Scribes and Pharisees ever on the watch to catch Him in His words—He has no leisure for retirement, no time for rest, not even an opportunity for taking food during the long, busy day.

We can well imagine how an anxious mother must have

[1] *Mark* vi. 3.

regarded such a mode of life. It was cruel. The strongest could not stand it. Something must be done to save Him from the people, to save Him too from Himself. He is at the call of all who need Him. He has no thought of Himself. Then His friends must interfere.

But the crowd is so great it is impossible for any of His relatives to come near Him. The anxiety must be very intense which leads to the extreme course that is now adopted. A message is passed through, handed on from one to another, till at last it reaches the Speaker, interrupting Him in one of His entrancing discourses. It says that His mother and His brothers who are waiting on the fringe of the crowd, want Him.

The people would suppose that some urgent reason had prompted them to interfere in this very abrupt way. Had this been the case we cannot suppose that He would have refused to comply with the wish of those who in the way of nature would have the first claim on Him. If He would permit a discourse to be interrupted by the intrusion of a sick man let down through the roof, as we know He did on one memorable occasion, He could not have refused a similar appeal from His own family. But He must have known very well that it was simply for His own sake that the message had been passed up to Him. We may suppose that before this His mother had had conversations with Him on the subject of the risks He was running. That dread of His over-working Himself is a touch of nature which every mother will understand; but behind it was the darker fear of danger from His antagonists, now embittered by jealousy at His immense popularity.

Just in proportion to the tenderness of the maternal solicitude that had prompted the act of interference, must have been the shock of pain that Mary received on hearing how Jesus received it with the question, "Who is My mother? and who are My brethren?" and then the added answer as He stretched out His hand towards His disciples

and declared, "Behold My mother and My brethren. For whosoever shall do the will of My Father which is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother."[1] We rejoice in these words as at once a proof of His large humanity and an indication of His absolute devotion to the will of God. Wherever that will is done there are those whom He will own as nearest akin to Himself. A most gracious admission! But what must the great utterance have meant to Mary? She would not have been a woman if she could have learnt without keen distress that other women were placed on a level with herself as mothers to her Son. We may be sure that it was painful to Jesus to have to speak thus. Only the high claims of His mission could have induced Him to say what He knew must hurt His mother. This was part of the great sacrifice He had to make. We are in danger of being entangled in the subtle snares of a family selfishness, a selfishness that is all the more enslaving for the fact that it shelters itself under the name of love. But while Jesus escaped from a temptation which must have been exceptionally urgent to His intensely sympathetic nature, certainly at a great cost to Himself, one would think that in Mary the perception that her motherhood was thus to be reduced to ashes on the altar, a burnt-offering of supreme devotion to the will of God for the benefit of all who do that will, would have roused a feeling of resentment as at a cruel wrong, an outrage on the rights of nature. She may have attained to so strong a faith in her Son that even this severe strain, the most severe it had yet received, did not shake it. Faith may have remained; but joy must have fled, giving place to pain—destined henceforth to be her inseparable companion.

A confirmation of this position is to be found on the very next occasion when we encounter any allusion to Mary,[2] that where a woman in the crowd, unable to restrain her admiration, bursts out into an exclamation of

[1] *Matt.* xii. 48–50. [2] *Luke* xi. 27, 28.

congratulations for the mother of such a Son. Dear soul! Had she been denied the privilege of motherhood herself, and so led to envy them in one to whom they had come with exceptional honour? or had she once possessed a son who had since been snatched from her by the hand of death? or, far worse than that, had she suffered the awful agony of seeing her son grow up utterly unworthy of the ocean of love she had lavished upon him? We know nothing of her circumstances; we are supplied with no details with which to fix her identity. St. Luke only describes her as "a certain woman out of the multitude." Yet she was a real woman; it was a woman's heart that uttered itself apparently in an unpremeditated exclamation, though, as has been pointed out, in words that echoed a rabbinical saying.[1] Still, she little dreamed what she was saying. Evidently she had not the faintest suspicion of Mary's peculiarly painful experience. How often would envy be turned to pity if we knew the secrets of those towards whom it is directed!

In spirit and scope the words with which Jesus answered this singular interruption are closely allied to what He had said on the previous occasion—"Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it." Again the area of privilege is extended; again the disciples of Jesus are all embraced in the great circle; again it is obedience that is especially accentuated. It has been suggested that Jesus disapproved of the sentimental tone of the woman's remark. He disliked the descent into mere emotionalism. The rapture of feeling was not what He desired to encourage. He turned to the healthier regions of truth and service. Discipleship and obedience are the roads to true blessedness. But this could not but tend further to separate Mary from her Son, if a report of it reached her. The

[1] "Blessed the hour in which the Messiah was created; blessed the womb whence He issued; blessed the generation that sees Him; blessed the eye that is worthy to behold Him."—Edersheim, *Life and Times, &c.*, ii. p. 201.

news of the incident must have been accompanied by another thrust of the sword in her side.

Thus right through His public ministry, and indeed even in some degree before this, from His boyhood, though then He had lived in the subjection of dutiful obedience to His parents, Mary suffered from repeated shocks of pain at her Son's treatment of her. In some respects this is always so. The pains of maternity do not end with birth; they only begin there. Nor is it only the thoughtless or unworthy child who causes distress to his parent. The example of Jesus shows how the best of children, even by reason of their very sense of the paramount claims of duty, may be compelled to inflict suffering on those who love them most intensely. Such is the irony of life. It may well be considered that so cruel a condition of existence is an indication of mal-adjustment, the derangement caused by some great wrong, but the wrong may be neither in the child nor in the parent. It was the sin of the world that made Jesus "a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief"; and it was what that sin necessitated in His mission that was stabbing the heart of Mary. The Son's sorrow is reflected on the mother. Because He is the Man of Sorrows she must be the Mother of Sorrows.

This is the more clearly apparent at the end. Mary's was the agonising privilege of being the mother of the Crucified. The mocking and insults that were flung at Him struck her. The cruel scourging that fell on his flesh smote her heart. The nails that were driven through His hands and feet also passed through the very nerves and fibres of her soul. His fearful weariness and exhaustion, His thirst, His agony, were the tortures she endured in her bruised and bleeding motherhood. Not a word of all this is recorded in the gospels. Painters have tried to set it before us in pictures of the pale face and sinking form, as Mary stands supported by the friendly arm of John, or falls fainting among her women friends. Their

work is wholly of the imagination. The evangelists are intent on other matters. Three of them make no mention of Mary in this last dread scene. It is John only who tells us that the mother of Jesus was in the little group of friends who had ventured near the cross, and he drops no hint of any word or action on the part of Mary.

But the bare fact that Mary was present at the crucifixion is not without significance. It is not every woman who would have found it possible to be there. The story of the cross has been handled so much as a topic of cold abstract theology, while any real experience of what it means is so very remote from the world in which we live that the actual horror of it does not affect us in any degree proportionate to the facts of what must have taken place. A man nailed to the beams, hung up in the blazing sun, dragged, strained, longing to shift his posture in an agony of cramp, yet unable to do so, and his slightest movement sending a fresh thrill of torture through his body; then a burning thirst, a throbbing head, the weight of which on the weary neck grows intolerable; and all this to continue—since no vital organ has been touched—till the relief of death only supervenes from sheer exhaustion, when long-enduring nature can hold out no longer. We shrink with horror from the contemplation of the ghastly spectacle.

Now, this was witnessed by Mary, if not to the very end, still in the agony of its tortures. And the Sufferer was her Son. Could any sword pierce the soul as hers was pierced now?

Nor was even this the sum of her sorrows. We know that to Jesus the greatest suffering was not the bodily torment He endured. The dark and dreadful burden of the world's sin was upon Him. It is scarcely probable that Mary entered far into this dread mystery, even if she knew anything about it. But her motherly heart must have been quick to discern that a great and terrible grief of soul was

breaking the heart of her Son. If she could not at all comprehend what this was, the burden of the unknown secret must have been all the more intolerable to her. But one thing she could see, and that must have been a strange, sad perplexity to her. Her Son was dying, dying in His youth, apparently before He had accomplished His great mission; dying because rejected by His people, the people He had come to redeem. Was this all that the great hopes she had cherished concerning Him had come to? Was this to be the end of her fond dreams? And were they only dreams, dreams such as any foolish young mother might have entertained in those quiet, happy hours when she was watching the babe at her breast? Had she not received strange premonitions? Were those scenes of her youth no better than the fancies of hysterical girlhood? Was there no ground for the gratitude of the *Magnificat?* Was Simeon's prophecy no more than the maundering of an old man in his dotage? And that wonderful career of her Son with its brilliant opening in the rapid gathering of so many followers, was it but a hollow delusion of no real significance? How rapidly the popularity had died away! For long He had been deserted by all but a very few. Then her hopes had revived at that happy scene when He rode in rustic triumph among the Hosannas of the people as they strewed His path with greenery and even flung down their garments for Him to ride over? And now had it come to this—this shame and horror and ruin of all her hopes? What was the meaning of the prophecies that went before and the promises of His later career if this was to be the awful end of all—this lurid sunset of the day that had dawned in celestial radiance?

Questions such as these may well be imagined to have coursed through the distracted mind of His mother as she stood at the foot of the cross where Jesus hung dying. This was the worst sword-thrust of all. It is of this moment that Mrs. Browning writes:—

"Mother full of lamentation,
Near that cross she wept her passion,
Whereon hung her child and Lord.
Through her spirit, worn and wailing,
Tortured by the stroke and failing,
Passed and pierced the prophet's sword."

And yet a gleam of light falls on the page in this darkest passage. St. John only introduces Mary here for the sake of that one point of relief in the dreadful story. Jesus is not so absorbed in the endurance of His own sufferings as to forget the needs of His mother. Provision must be made for her now that He will be no longer at her side. The fact that Jesus has to meet this necessity is suggestive in several ways. It shows that she has been accustomed to look to Him for protection. Evidently she has no home of her own at this time. What was probable before is now quite certain; Mary is a widow. But at an earlier period she appeared with the brothers of Jesus.[1] How is it that they are not now able to take charge of her? Dr. Lightfoot took this incident in *John* as a decisive proof that the "brethren of the Lord" could not be Mary's children, and must therefore be either children of Joseph by a former marriage, or children of a sister of Mary, and only cousins to Jesus.[2] But this does not entirely explain the situation, because in the earlier incident they are closely associated with Mary, and now she is alone and needing some one to care for her. May it be that the unbelief of the brothers had led to a division in the family circle; they forsaking Jesus, while His mother still clung to Him? If that were the case we could understand how in this moment of extreme tension it would have been difficult for Mary to find any consolation among them.

Whatever may have been the precise cause, Mary is now left quite desolate. With the considerateness of a true Son, in spite of what He had said before apparently pointing in

[1] *Matt.* xii. 47.
[2] *Biblical Essays*, "*The Brethren of the Lord.*"

another direction, Jesus now commits His mother to the charge of the beloved disciple, who can be no other than John—"Woman, behold thy son!"—"Behold thy mother!"

> "In the wild heart of that eclipse
> These words came from His wasted lips."[1]

If we are to take his language in its strict sense, John acted immediately on this command of his Master and removed Mary from the unendurable spectacle of her Son's death, so that she was spared the agony of witnessing the very last scene. "And from that hour," says John, "the disciple took her unto his own home."[2]

At this point we begin to lose sight of Mary. The four evangelists give us various lists of the women who went to the tomb of Jesus; but none of them include the name of His mother. She had been with some of these women at the cross, for John says, "There were standing by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene."[3] All these women are met with again at the grave, except Mary the mother of Jesus. She was now apart from the women friends who had stood by her during the crucifixion, the evangelist would suggest, in retirement in St. John's house. We can readily imagine that she had no heart for those dreary ministries to the dead which, singularly attractive to some natures, are just as painful to others.

But what is more remarkable is that we have no hint that Jesus ever appeared to His mother after His resurrection. None of the evangelists mention His being seen by any members of His family, though from St. Paul we learn that He appeared to James. It is commonly assumed that when He appeared to "above five hundred brethren at once,"[4] Mary would have been of the company, and there is a reasonable probability that this would

[1] Alexander Smith.
[2] *John* xix. 27.
[3] *John* xix. 25.
[4] 1 *Cor.* xv. 6.

have been the case. Still, even if we make the most of that, the mother of Jesus only comes in as one of five hundred, while to His intimate disciples He appears in private, and that on several occasions. We have but a few small scraps of information about the appearances of the risen Christ; and of course we cannot tell but that He may have visited His mother for the comfort she must have so sadly needed, though no mention is made of the fact. Here we must leave the matter, with this certain conclusion that at all events Mary was not regarded by the evangelists as a very prominent personage in the church.

We have but one more glimpse of Mary. In those early days before the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, but after their last sight of their Lord when He had ascended from the Mount of Olives, the apostles were in the habit of meeting together in the upper chamber where He had taken the last supper with them; and with the apostles were certain women, among whom was Mary the mother of Jesus with His brethren. This is most significant. The family is now united; and it is in closest association with the eleven.

At this point Mary fades entirely out of view. One tradition relates that true to his trust, St. John remained in Jerusalem watching over her till her death, and did not go to Ephesus till after that event—a likely enough conjecture. Another less probable tradition carries her with the apostle to Asia. These traditions are too late to be of any historical value whatever. Mary's part was wholly concerned with the obscure early life of her Son. Nothing can be more clear than that she stood in no kind of relation to His later public mission, that she was in no way concerned with His supreme work in the redemption of the world. His loneliness in that work is reflected in her sorrow. Because she is the mother of the Christ she cannot but be the *Mater Dolorosa.*

CHAPTER III

The Great Miracle—A Study in Theology

THE supreme if not the sole interest with which we are drawn to a character so simple and a life so obscure as the character and life of Mary is found in the fact that she was the mother of our Lord. The uniqueness of His being makes her relationship to Him unique. Of all things in the world the most beautiful and Divine is motherhood; but here we have a glory of motherhood entirely without parallel in history. Mary's honour is incomparable with the honour of the mother of a man of highest genius and most transcendent goodness; because the holy Being to whom she gave birth was more than man, was the only begotten Son of God.

Every one of the writers of the New Testament bears witness to the Divinity of Christ; or if it be thought that the two brief references to Him in the epistle of St. James (i. 1; ii. 2) are too meagre to express that idea, still they are not inconsistent with it, and indeed they are entirely in accord with what is certainly the unanimous testimony of all the other writers. This truth has been accepted by the great body of Christians from the time of the apostles down to our own day. To many of us it is the only possible explanation of the life and work of Jesus as they appear in the gospel records.

At the same time most of the New Testament writers, believing, as all of them do, in the full and perfect humanity of Jesus, also recognise that He came into the world by birth from a human mother. While this is

clearly narrated by two of the evangelists—St. Matthew and St. Luke—it is also implied by the others, both St. Mark and St. John making mention of the mother of Jesus. St. Paul also distinctly writes of Him as having been "born of a woman."[1] The docetic notion that the Christ was a Heavenly Being who simply appeared on earth in a phantom form finds no lodgment in the New Testament.

When, however, we bring these two facts into juxtaposition, when we consider the birth of Jesus in the light of His Divinity, we are face to face with the most stupendous miracle the mind of man can conceive of. The miracle of miracles is the Incarnation. If we believe this we need not stumble at other miracles in Scripture; for they are all of less magnitude. Besides, if the very being of Jesus involves a miracle of such a character as this, is it surprising that His deeds should be miraculous? On the other hand, if we cannot accept this fundamental miracle, it is of little moment whether we believe the gospel statements about any other miracles, and quite superfluous to endeavour to prove the reality of them, for in that case the value has entirely disappeared. This is the great miracle that constitutes the foundation rock of the Christian faith—a woman gave birth to the Son of God!

Now, it is a further position to assert that with this miracle of the Incarnation and the birth of Christ from a woman, in Divine as well as human nature, there is associated the miracle of the virginity of the mother. This may be regarded as an additional miracle. We could not have assumed *à priori* that it would have been present. It comes into the history on the testimony of two of the evangelists; and this testimony is most explicit, St. Matthew and St. Luke leaving us no room for doubting what their meaning is. They both deny that Joseph was the father of Jesus; they both assert that Mary was a virgin when she bore her Son.

[1] *Gal.* iv. 4.

But it cannot be ignored that in the present day many people find difficulty in accepting these statements. It is pointed out that, beyond the two gospels referred to, we have no word concerning them, that all the rest of the New Testament is silent on the subject. Neither St. Mark nor St. John have anything to say about it; St. Paul never alludes to it; it is absent from the utterances and writings of St. James, from the two epistles ascribed to St. Peter, from the epistle to the Hebrews, from the Apocalypse, and from St. John's three epistles as well as his gospel, already referred to. Moreover, the accounts in the first and third gospels vary considerably, and therefore it has been concluded that they are not derived from the *Logia*, a document that is supposed to have contributed the greater part of the common matter in *Luke* and *Matthew* which is not to be found in *Mark*. Thus, neither of the primitive witnesses, *Mark* and the *Logia*, contains any reference to the virgin birth.

It must be admitted that the evidence concerning the mode of the birth of Jesus is much less full than the evidence for the Divinity of His nature—which, as we have seen, is overwhelming, and practically universal. Now, the first consideration to be noted here is that these two must be kept distinct. Disastrous consequences to Christian faith are threatened by the reckless and irrational habit of confounding them together that has been allowed in some writers and speakers. The matter of infinite importance to us is the Divinity of Christ. If that is lost to faith, everything is lost. Surely, then, it is a great advantage to be able to point to the evidence for it in all the rich and manifold forms in which this evidence is accumulated; and it is little less than fatal folly to mix it up with the question of the virgin birth, profoundly interesting as that is on its own account. The direct result of such a misguided policy is to open the door for doubts as to the vastly more important truth.

Let us recollect that those New Testament teachers who betray no knowledge of the miracle of the virgin birth are unhesitating in their faith in the Divinity of Christ. Nothing can be more evident than the inference that they at least did not need to be first assured as to the mode of His entrance into the world before they would yield the submission of intellect and heart to His highest claims. To them the reasons for believing in Christ and accepting His Incarnation were wholly independent of His birth mystery. Whatever that might be, their thought of Him would be the same, and nothing that might be revealed concerning it in later years could in any way affect their faith. The case of their immediate converts must have been similar, because these people were won to belief in Jesus Christ and His claims without hearing one word about the nature of His birth. It was enough for them that He was the Lord's Christ, both Divine and human. Why should not their faith be ours?

And yet there are people who persistently confuse these two very distinct questions, declaring that the Incarnation and the virgin birth must stand or fall together, and boldly asserting that if they lost belief in the latter they would give up faith in the former.

It is said that the virgin birth alone preserves the possibility of the Divinity of Christ; that He could not be the Son of God if this had not been His earthly origin. But is it not rash and hazardous to venture on any positive assertions as to what could, or what could not, occur in the realm of the superhuman? If the Incarnation is itself a tremendous miracle, how can any man say what may be its conditions, or within what limits it may be possible? All things are possible with God. Reasoning of this sort implies the half-hearted faith that tries to eke out its feeble energy by leaning on little props of rationalism. If God works so great a miracle as to send His Son into the world in a human life, we may be sure He can work it in what-

ever way He pleases; it is not for us to say how it might or might not be done.

Then it has been supposed that the virgin birth is the one security for the sinlessness of Jesus, that if He had not come into the world precisely in this way He must have been born with the taint of hereditary evil. The same answer serves for this assumption. It professes to define the limits within which God may be permitted to work a miracle. How do we know what are the conditions that make sinlessness possible? But more may be added here. In any case Jesus had a human parentage, if only a maternal parentage, since Mary was human. Then why should not Jesus inherit sin from her? If we only thought of natural consequences this would seem to be inevitable, for nobody in the present day could agree with St. Augustine's gross conception of the mode in which sin is transmitted from parent to child. If we are to enter into the physiology of the question, we must recognise the fact that, on the whole, while daughters tend to inherit the characteristics of their fathers, sons are more inclined to derive hereditary traits from the mother's side. Hence it might be argued that in the birth of a son it was the mother who should be dispensed with rather than the father, or else that Mary's child should have been born as a woman. It is only necessary to state these conjectures to show how unworthy they are of the great and solemn subject with which they are brought into connection. We trifle with the profound mystery when we bring our petty physiological rules and examples into any relation with it whatever. Therefore the argument that would rest the freedom from original sin on considerations of this order must be dismissed at once as quite unsuitable, and not to be thought of for a moment in such a connection.

The field being thus clear of irrelevant ideas, we can keep the two truths distinct, and take each on its own merits. The great miracle is that of the Incarnation. It stands

alone, superb, sublime, unapproachable, hushing and awing our speculations, subduing and winning our faith, flooding our lives with the love of a Saviour who is at once our Lord and our Brother. But the secondary miracle has an interest of its own. We are now free to examine it calmly as it comes to us in the record of history. It is not an article of faith in the sense that faith depends on it; for, as we have seen, the faith of most of the early Christians had nothing to do with it. But it is a subject of interest, as any fact touching the life of Jesus must be; and it is of especial interest to us here for the light it throws on the experience of Mary.

Approaching the subject then with a certain degree of mental detachment—without a shadow of that feverish anxiety of the drowning man clutching at a straw that appears to be the unhappy mental attitude of perturbed minds when this is assumed to be a question of life and death to the faith—are we yet to give way before the clamour of criticism, and set the narrative of the miraculous mode of the birth of Jesus by the side of the stories of Buddha and Cyrus, of Romulus and Augustus, as an indication of the marvels with which a fond tradition delights to encircle the cradles of the great?

Let us now proceed to consider whether there are any facts tending to forbid that conclusion. In the first place, it is no small thing that we have the testimony of the first and third gospels. There is good reason to believe that *Matthew* was written before the destruction of Jerusalem, that is to say before the year 70. If the author did not obtain his information directly from the lips of Mary, he must have been in close contact with those who moved in her circle. His work therefore contains well-nigh contemporary evidence. We have no time for the formation of a myth. Legends of shadowy character demand more scope for their development. It is coming to be widely recognised that the third gospel was written a little after the

overthrow of Jerusalem; but although this opinion gives it a somewhat later date than *Matthew*, it still belongs to the same cycle of literature. Moreover, in his preface St. Luke describes how carefully he searched for evidence from first-hand witnesses. That preface, evidently honest, is a strong guarantee of historical accuracy. It is not easy to believe that the man who wrote it was the victim of idle fancies that had sprung up almost in his own lifetime. He who doubts the miracle of the virgin birth has two stubborn witnesses to face, and the more closely they are examined the more difficult will it be to set aside their testimony.

It has been objected that the narratives are very distinct in several points. That may be admitted; but it only strengthens the case, for it proves that they are independent. Evidently neither evangelist had seen the work of the other. Yet they are agreed on this fact concerning the birth of Jesus. Two independent streams of testimony here coincide, though they have come from different sources. They are mutually confirmatory of one another; and the more so from the very fact that there are divergencies with regard to accessories.

But, further, it is objected, the two genealogies give the line of Joseph. How can they show the Davidic origin of Jesus if He is not Joseph's son? It might be replied that quite apart from this question some commentators have taken one at least of the lists to refer to Mary. But if, as most now believe, they both belong to Joseph, that fact must have been known to the two evangelists; and certainly in direct statement they do ascribe them to the husband. But these are the very writers who narrate the virgin birth—the only New Testament writers who do so. Then they must have faced the obvious inconclusiveness of their position—either intending simply to assert the legal rights of Jesus derived through His putative father, or assuming that Joseph followed Jewish custom in marrying in his own tribe and family connection. At all events they

must have been aware of the objection. If we had met the statement about the virgin birth in one document, and the genealogy of Joseph in another, critics would naturally have pounced on the latter as a disproof of the former. The case is very different where the two apparently conflicting statements lie side by side in the same works.

A strong confirmation of the truth of the narratives of the birth of our Lord in *Matthew* and *Luke* may be found in a comparison of these narratives with the apocryphal gospels of the infancy, fantastic, and in some instances irreverent productions altogether unworthy of the subject. Here the facts are recorded with a dignity and a reserve of manner entirely lacking in those puerile productions, which represent just what might be expected of the unfettered imagination of primitive Christendom. If our gospel accounts are to be traced to the same origin, how comes it that the character of them is entirely different? The sobriety of treatment throughout, and the solemn grandeur of the Bethlehem scenes as they lie before us on the pages of the New Testament, speak for their own veracity.

Further, it is to be observed that while the miracle of the virgin birth is not narrated anywhere else in the New Testament it is never denied. Among all the allusions to Jesus and His human life there is not one that in any way conflicts with the mystery of His origin as that is revealed by two of the evangelists. Is not that a singular fact if the narratives of the nativity are to be reckoned as the products of superstitious imagination? Joseph, it is true, is referred to as the father of Jesus; but that is the case more emphatically and frequently in *Matthew* and *Luke* than anywhere else in the New Testament—again the verbal discrepancy appearing in the very documents that record the virgin birth! Evidently, therefore, the narrators of that mystery see no difficulty in employing the convenient popular language according to which Joseph and Mary were described as the parents of Jesus.

Quite recently attempts have been made to explain away the gospel narratives of the nativity by reference to curious Jewish legends about the Messiah. It is not at all certain how ancient these legends may be, the Talmud in which some of them are found not having been written till long after the time of Christ, so that, although doubtless it contains the traditional lore of many centuries of Judaism, we cannot tell to what extent Christian notions may have been unconsciously admitted. Whether that be the case or not here, the instances that have been cited are only parallel in character to those found in the apocryphal gospels for triviality, grotesqueness, and coarseness. Stories that could not be quoted on a decent page would never have been the seed-bed of the simple, lofty, beautiful narratives in *Matthew* and *Luke.*

When we pass beyond the period of the New Testament we are confronted with a singular unanimity of opinion in the great body of the Christian Church. It is impossible to say how early the phrase in the Apostles' Creed, "Born of the Virgin Mary," became a recognised part of the confession of faith. It is now known that the creed did not originate with the apostles themselves. Still there is reason to believe that the great central truths which it contains were those held to be most important by the primitive Church. We may suspect tradition, and we may point out how readily it accretes error; but there are memories so reverently cherished that we may be sure they are not of yesterday, and there is a time so ancient and so near to the events that we must accord to its traditions more or less of the character of history. In fact there is a point where tradition and history meet, where the one merges into the other.

Now, this is virtually the case with the clause in the Apostles' Creed cited above. The ideas it contains are in early Church writers who were either themselves in direct communication with men of the Apostolic time, or who at

least could reach back to that time by means of but a single connecting link. Thus Ignatius, stating what reads very like a confession of faith, describes "the one and only Physician," as "of flesh and of spirit, generate and ingenerate, God in man, true Life in death, Son of Mary and Son of God, first passible and then impassible, Jesus Christ our Lord."[1] The phrase "Son of Mary and Son of God" recalls in particular St. Luke's way of describing the birth of Jesus, where the angel promises Mary that her Child shall be "the Son of the Most High,"[2] and "the Son of God."[3] Read in the light of the third gospel, the phrase in Ignatius certainly appears to suggest that Jesus had but one human parent, and even apart from this comparison the language seems to point to the same conclusion. Now Ignatius was a disciple of the Apostle John, to whose charge Jesus had committed His mother. He was therefore in closest touch with the Apostolic tradition, and his testimony on so personal a matter as this is certainly more than the record of a vague floating tradition, more than the repetition of a mere baseless legend.

Justin Martyr is of peculiar interest to us in this connection, for while he wrote a little later than Ignatius, in the middle of the second century, he was a native of Samaria, and he had much intercourse with Jews and knew the Jewish Christians. This Father appeals repeatedly to the Old Testament for predictions of the virgin birth. Thus, in his *First Apology*,[4] he discusses the application of the prediction in Isaiah vii. 14, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive," &c., to the birth of Jesus Christ, having alluded to this a little earlier, writing, "In these books, then, of the prophets we found Jesus our Christ foretold as coming, born of a virgin," &c.[5] Again he writes, "But why, through the power of the Word, according to the will of God the Father and Lord of all, he was born of a virgin as a man . . . an intelligent man will be

[1] *Ephes.* 7. [2] *Luke* i. 32. [3] *Ibid.* i. 35. [4] 1 *Apol.* 33. [5] *Ibid.* 31.

able to comprehend from what has been already so largely said."[1]

In his *Dialogue with Trypho* he argues against the Jewish interpretation of the passage from Isaiah.[2] We are not here concerned with his argument—the logic may be faulty; nor is he to be appealed to on the grounds of patristic authority. The simple fact is that he is a witness to a very ancient general belief among the primitive Christians.

It is needless to point to the unanimous belief of later fathers, because with them we pass beyond the limits of testimony—even traditional testimony, and find ourselves in the region of settled faith. This chorus of unanimity is only broken by some who reject the chief positions held by the main body of the Christian Church. No early Christian believer in the Incarnation is to be found among those who deny the virgin birth. Logically tenable as such a position might be if there were reasons for taking it up, in point of fact it never was taken up. But the denial of the Incarnation did not spring out of doubts as to the virgin birth. It was always the other way. First the Catholic view of the nature of Christ was rejected; and then as a consequence the accounts of His birth found in *Matthew* and *Luke* were set aside. The denial was found in two opposite directions. The first case that appears is that of Cerinthus, an Egyptian Jew contemporary with St. John, who asserted that the Christ descended on the man Jesus at His baptism and left Him at His crucifixion. That is to say, he denied the Incarnation. According to his teaching Jesus was simply a man on whom the Divine Christ rested for a time. The Ebionites were Jewish Christians who also denied the Incarnation; but their position was like what we call Unitarian. Very different is the position of Marcion who came to Rome from Pontus, in the reign of Hadrian, on a great reforming mission to revive interest in the teachings of St. Paul. The only gospel he

[1] 1 *Apol.* 46. [2] *Try.* 84.

accepted was *Luke*, which he mutilated, cutting out the narratives of the infancy of our Lord. This, however, he did on doctrinal, not on critical grounds. Now, he too denied the Incarnation, but by denying the humanity of Christ, who, as he taught, suddenly appeared in the Capernaum synagogue, under the form of a man, yet not wearing a real human body. With Marcion the humanity of our Lord was but a phantom appearance. Of course, docetism so pronounced as this was forced to repudiate the narratives of the birth of Jesus; not, however, on account of any peculiarities in them, but simply because it denied the birth of Jesus from a human mother in any way. Cerinthus, therefore, and Marcion cannot be cited as witnesses against the narratives in *Matthew* and *Luke*. It is perfectly clear that they were not troubled by doubts on historical grounds; they simply brought their idea of the facts into line with their theory.

In the Syrian palimpsest of the gospels which was discovered by Mrs. Lewis at the monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai there are some curious various readings relating to the birth of Jesus. Verse 16 in the 1st chapter of *Matthew* has—"Joseph, the husband to whom was betrothed Mary the Virgin, begat Jesus, who is called the Christ;" and verse 25, referring to Joseph, reads—"And she bare him a son." Singularly enough these startling variations in the text are found side by side with the full narrative of the virgin birth as that appears in our *Matthew*. They only make the Syriac manuscript inconsistent with itself; and therefore there can be no doubt that they do not represent the original text on which the version was founded or even the original form of the Syriac version, though the question of their origin is very obscure. For this reason they cannot be allowed to throw any serious doubt on the narrative as that appears in our generally accepted texts.

It is hardly necessary to point out that the rejection of

the Christian teaching concerning the birth of Jesus by the Jews is no evidence whatever against the truth of that teaching. In his great work, *Against Celsus*,[1] Origen refers to the calumny that had introduced a man called "Panthera" as the father of Jesus. This very name is a proof that the calumny had no historical basis, for it is evidently a play on the Greek word for "virgin"—*Parthenos.*

Then it may be pointed out that although certain speculative ideas of Alexandrian or Rabbinical thought might be supposed to favour the notion of birth from a virgin, the trend of Jewish thought generally, and especially that of the popular Messianic ideas in which the early Christians had been brought up, was quite in another direction. The prophecy from Isaiah quoted by St. Matthew is used as a favourite argument by the fathers. There is a growing conviction on the part of criticism that in the original Hebrew that passage cannot be certainly applied to a virgin birth, the word translated "virgin" meaning "young woman." Still the Greek of the Septuagint is *Parthenos*—the usual term for "virgin"; and it was the Greek version that the Christians mostly used. But to suppose that this word gave rise to the narratives is to hang them on a very slender thread. On the other side we must place the fact that the Jews held marriage in the highest honour. Yet these narratives are found in the most Jewish parts of the New Testament. There, of all places, it would be least likely for the time-honoured expectation that the Messiah would be born in due course of natural Jewish parentage to be set aside.

Probably all these considerations will count for very little with most people who are reluctant to accept the gospel narratives of the Nativity, because their real objection is found in the miraculous character of those narratives, and of course if it is enough to say, "miracles do not

[1] Book I., 28 ff.

happen," these narratives must go the way of the myths of the credulous. But, as we saw at the commencement, the miracle of the virgin birth only comes before us as an adjunct and appendage of the most stupendous of all miracles. If it stood by itself we might be shy of it. When it is associated with the Incarnation—and it has no place apart from that marvel and mystery—to object to it simply as a miracle, and yet to believe in the Incarnation, is to take up a very inconsistent position. For this reason we cannot help the case by attempting to drag in biological analogies of *parthenogenesis*. The feeble rationalism that this method of arguing illustrates simply disgusts the men of science whom it aims at conciliating. Let it be frankly admitted that no freak of nature could account for this thing; if it could be so accounted for its significance to religion would forthwith cease. The sole value of the wonderful birth rises from the fact that it is the manner in which the Son of God came into the world when taking upon Himself human flesh, and the credibility of the narratives of the Nativity rests on the assurance that they describe the Advent of One whose existence from His birth to His resurrection was throughout a perpetual miracle.

CHAPTER IV

The Madonna—A Study in Imagination

FROM Mary of Nazareth, wife of Joseph the carpenter, concerning whom history has little to tell us that would exalt her in character and nature above the wives of other Galilean peasants—although by the great grace of God on her was conferred the immeasurable honour of being chosen as the mother of the Christ—to the Blessed Virgin of Roman Catholic tradition, the Madonna of art and poetry and fond devotion, is a long journey over which imagination moves by leaps and bounds. The process of the evolution of the Madonna, in regions of curiously mingled piety and superstition, devotion and fraud, extends over the whole course of the history of Christendom, only reaching a climax at the Vatican Council in the year 1870, where for the first time the immaculate conception of the Virgin was officially affirmed by the Church as an essential dogma of the faith.

No sooner are the rays of criticism allowed to play on this monstrous growth than it begins to melt away like a house of snow under a summer sun. And yet, except for purely controversial purposes, the negations of ultra-Protestantism, logically valid as they may be, land us in dreary and uninteresting results. There is a more fruitful way of studying the subject than treating it simply as a chapter in the humiliating history of human error; this is to endeavour to understand it, to search for its significance, to trace out its causes, to recognise the blind instinct, the dumb passion, the yearning heart-hunger of which the

cult of the Virgin is the pathetically perverted expression. What is the meaning of the great idea of the Madonna as a phase of human thought, as a revelation of the heart of man?

In tracing out the popular Roman Catholic notions concerning the mother of Jesus we shall have to take account of the Perpetual Virginity—the Immaculate Conception—the Assumption, virtual Apotheosis, and consequent worship of the Virgin Mary.

I. *The Perpetual Virginity.*

Not only devout Roman Catholics but also many thoughtful Protestants have firmly believed in the perpetual virginity of the mother of Jesus. Thus, for example, the doctrine was stated in the strongest possible way by Jeremy Taylor; and in the present day some among us shrink from the thought that there were other children in the home at Nazareth besides the holy child Jesus who called Mary "Mother."

But anybody who came to the gospel narratives with a mind entirely unprejudiced would certainly conclude that such children existed—that Mary and Joseph lived together as husband and wife, and that in due course a family of children was born to them. The language of St. Matthew about the interval before the birth of Jesus distinctly implies that after that event Joseph took Mary as his wife, living with her in the state of holy matrimony;[1] in describing Jesus as her "first-born son," St. Luke implies that younger sons followed; the evangelists' plain statement that His mother and His brethren were inquiring for Him is more naturally understood with reference to actual brothers than concerning some cousins accompanying their aunt, or even half-brothers; and the questions of His fellow-townsmen—"Is not this the carpenter, the son of

[1] *Matt.* i. 25.

Mary, and brother of James, and Joses, and Judas, and Simon? and are not His sisters with us?[1]—point to the same obvious conclusion. Moreover, there is not a word in the whole of the New Testament that in any way conflicts with the simple and natural reading of these passages, unless we can adduce the paragraph in *John* which tells us that Jesus committed His mother to the charge of the beloved disciple, an action which Dr. Lightfoot considered fatal to the idea that she had children of her own, but which we have seen admits of a satisfactory explanation in harmony with that hypothesis.[2]

Neither do we meet, among the earlier Church Fathers, with any hint of a denial that "the brethren of the Lord" were rightly so described. On the contrary, Tertullian, writing about the end of the second century, distinctly asserts that they were actual brothers of Jesus, arguing against Marcion in favour of the real humanity of our Lord on the ground of this relationship.[3] He has no idea of the perpetual virginity of Mary; for he considers her to have been the mother of a family, which is the more remarkable seeing that he is strongly ascetic in tendency of thought. By about this time, however, the notion is being formulated; for Origen, writing a few years later, accepts it, and the authorities to which he appeals are two apocryphal works dating from the middle of the second century. One of these is the so-called "Gospel of Peter," the conclusion of which, a recently discovered fragment, is sufficient to betray its docetic character—it had been condemned by Serapion, in the second century, as unsound in faith. The other is a book we possess, the *Protevangelium* of James, which ascribes the "brethren" to Joseph by a previous wife, but contains also worthless legends such as that of the miraculous birth of Mary. Thus as far as we can trace the idea back, it seems to have

[1] *Mark* vi. 3. [2] See page 26.
[3] *Adv. Marc.* iv. 19; *De Carne Christi*, 7.

risen in a morass of utterly unreliable literature. During the course of the third century it comes to be generally accepted, not however without question, for as late as St. Jerome in the fourth century, we find that Father vehemently protesting against the opinion of Helvidius that the "brethren" were Mary's children. Helvidius's opinion is crushed down by the weighty prejudices which have now made the question a matter of doctrine, and no longer one of purely historical fact. From this time it would be regarded as distinctly unorthodox to doubt the perpetual virginity of Mary; which is equivalent to saying, that, freedom of thought on the subject having been banished, later patristic statements regarding it cease to have any value.

When we consider the circumstances under which the belief in this dogma grew up we cannot have any difficulty in accounting for it. It may be traced to two sources. The first is a commendable feeling of reverence for Jesus Christ. It came to be thought unseemly that any second birth should be allowed from the mother of the Son of God. Unfortunately, however, such an imaginative paring of the facts of history to suit our ideas of what is right and fitting has often been proved faulty. Here, again, we meet with the presumptuousness that assumes the Divine action to be moulded on the lines of our notions of propriety. How can we deny that Jesus might be best fitted for His work as the Son of Man by being brought up in the discipline of a home where He was surrounded by brothers and sisters?

But a second factor of a less commendable character must be admitted to have played a large part in the evolution of this idea. The glorification of virginity was growing more prominent just in proportion as the Church was receding further from the primitive apostolic model. The unspeakable vices under the corroding influence of which the Roman Empire seemed to be simply rotting to death, called for extreme measures, and to the best men and

women of these dark and dreadful ages the only hope of purity seemed to lie in asceticism, or at all events this opposite extreme seemed to offer the ideal of highest sanctity. Thus, though marriage was permitted, it was only as a condescension to human weakness; and virginity was exalted as more honourable and holy.

Now, nothing would have been more abhorrent to the temperament that was bred in the morbid atmosphere of asceticism than the supposition that the mother of Jesus Christ could ever have been other than a virgin. That she might have been an honourable matron with her children about her—to us the most noble type of womanhood—would have seemed a lowering of her supreme position such as no devout mind could admit.

Then the effect reacts on the cause; and the perpetual virginity of Mary becomes the pattern for women who aspire to live the holiest life, as she becomes the type and ideal of saintly womanhood.

II. *The Immaculate Conception.*

The idea that the Virgin Mary was herself born without sin was of later growth. Certainly it is not contained in the New Testament; neither have we a hint of it in the writings of the primitive Fathers. Tertullian even speaks of Mary as guilty of unbelief;[1] and Origen interprets the sword that was to pierce her as the unbelief which caused her to stumble.[2] As late as the end of the fourth century, St. Chrysostom speaks of the "excessive vanity," the "foolish arrogance," and the "vain-glory," which led her to insist on speaking with Jesus when He was surrounded by the crowd.[3] But about this time ideas of a different character are appearing. Augustine said that he agreed

[1] *Adv. Marcion*, iv. 19; *De Carne Christi*, 7.
[2] *Hom. in Luke*, xviii.
[3] See Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible*, Article "Mary the Virgin."

with Pelagius in excepting Mary from actual sin—though not in also excepting her from original sin.[1] Pelagius, Augustine's great opponent, had gone further, declaring Mary to be free from all sin. In course of time, this Pelagian doctrine made way in the Church; but it was not till the year 1870 that it was authoritatively declared by an Œcumenical Council that Mary was free from any taint of original sin.

We may see two influences leading to this result. First, there was the growing tendency to do honour to Mary in all respects. But over and above that, there was the notion that it was only fitting for the holy Christ to be born of a sinless parent. Augustine says that it was "for the honour of the Lord" that Mary was born without sin. It was the general belief of the Church that the sin of Adam was transmitted from parent to child. But the Christ must be excluded from this evil inheritance; and to that end it was deemed fitting that the evil taint should be kept away from His mother. Of course this is only to throw the miracle a step further back; it is to make that take place in the birth of Mary which could equally well be believed as happening for the first time at the birth of Jesus. And then if there be a difficulty in the case of the sinless proceeding from the sinful, that difficulty is not lessened, it is even aggravated, for it is not pretended that Mary was a Divine Being at her birth; she had no inherent Divinity of nature such as her Son possessed to shield her from the transmission of her parents' sin. Moreover, unless we are to affirm a miraculous birth for Mary, the supposed effects of this in the case of her Son cannot be ascribed to her. Mary had an earthly human father as well as a mother. Hence arises the tendency to encircle the birth of Mary with marvels, and that, too, becomes in some way a miracle. The same process of thought must inevitably lead to a unique conception of the nature and character of the

[1] *De nat. et grat. contra Pelag.* c. 36.

Virgin's mother. Accordingly, the traditional St. Ann, mother of the Virgin, receives an exceptional amount of honour from devout admirers. In Palestine holy sites associated with St. Ann and churches dedicated to her name, are as numerous and as much revered as those connected with the name of the Virgin. But we cannot stop here. St. Ann should be of immaculate birth. Then what of her mother? The process calls for indefinite expansion backwards. We seem to want a race wholly distinct from the race of Adam and Eve to suit the demands of rigorous logic. If, however, that could be allowed, the incarnation would disappear, for Jesus Christ could no longer be regarded as sharing in our nature. This is the *reductio ad absurdum* of the whole process.

III. *The Assumption and Worship of the Virgin.*

The first steps towards the ascription of superhuman characteristics to the Virgin Mary can be traced back to early days. Irenæus in the second century describes her as the "Advocate of the Virgin Eve."[1] Mary is in a way the counterpart of Eve—the mother of all living. All sorts of fantastic fables and wonders cluster about the story of Mary in the apocryphal gospels of the third and fourth centuries, and it is to these books that we must look for the source of the grosser conceptions of Virgin worship. The process may be illustrated by the development of Christian art. In the most ancient monuments, the sarcophagi, the paintings in the catacombs, and even the seventh century mosaics, Mary appears simply as a veiled female figure with no indications of Divine glory. Later we come to the coronation of the Virgin by her Son. In Mediæval mosaics she is seen sitting on the same throne with Jesus Christ. Artists have set forth the glory of the scene when the Virgin was carried at her death up into heaven, there

[1] *Adv. Haer.*, v. 19, 1.

to receive Divine glory. But in the fourth century, when the notion first appeared in the Church, it was condemned by the Pope, Gelasius. We do not find this conception accepted by a recognised writer within the Church before Gregory of Tours in the sixth century. From his time it began to be regarded as right and necessary.

Prayers to the Virgin are met with earlier—in Ephraim the Syrian and Gregory Nazianzen, the latter relating of Justina that she besought the Virgin Mary to protect her when she was threatened with marriage. Then by slow degrees the worship of the Virgin blossoms out and takes full possession of the Church. Then there is given her the highest form of adoration above the veneration attached to saints and angels, though still to be formally distinguished from the worship of God; and numerous churches and altars come to be dedicated to her name. Henceforth she becomes virtually a goddess not only in the popular estimation, but even in the usages of the Church. Only a few years ago, when the Pope issued an Encyclical to the English Catholics urging them to pray for the conversion of this country, he directed the petition to be to the Virgin, and from the beginning to the end of his carefully-expressed document there was not a single word about prayer to any Higher Being. It is the intercession of the Virgin that is sought by the devout Catholic; and yet practically the constant habit of thus beseeching her aid must amount to worship and place her on the throne of God to the imagination of the worshipper. The exaltation of the statue of Mary even above that of her Son is a sign of this.

The vast process of apotheosis by which a woman is deified to the faith and imagination of a large part of Christendom must be attributed to a variety of influences both Christian and pagan. It is not without significance that the cult was most rapidly advanced during the period of the great Christological controversies of the fifth century. In particular the Nestorian controversy evidently issued in

this result. Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople, was accused of making too sharp a division between the two natures in Christ, of so separating the human from the Divine that our Lord would be regarded almost as two persons, the Son of Mary and the Son of God. While Nestorius was unable to assert that Mary was more than the mother of the man Jesus, his opponents vehemently maintained that she was the Mother of God. Thus the title *Theotokos*—"Mother of God"—became the watchword of orthodoxy. So fierce was the passion of opposition to Nestorius that fanatical monks would have torn the heretic to pieces as they exclaimed, with a rude jest—"He divides; let him be divided."

Thus, we see, the new title which gave so much honour to Mary was not invented for her sake at all; it was only brought in to make more clear what was the orthodox conception of the nature of Christ. He was so completely one person in the blending of His two natures, human and divine, that what could be affirmed of either could be affirmed of Him in His full being. Mary must be the Mother of God, because she is the mother of Jesus who is God. But though the argument was thus immediately concerned with the most abstract questions of Christology it could not rest in those remote regions. Inevitably it led to a new and more exalted idea of the nature and rank of the woman of whom so stupendous an assertion was made.

There is another side to this story. The leading opponent of Nestorius was Cyril, the patriarch of the rival see of Alexandria. For centuries there was bitter jealousy between the popes who occupied the chairs of these two great oriental patriarchates, with the result that what one cherished most ardently was generally denounced as heresy with equal ardour by the other. So Cyril was the great champion of the *Theotokos* doctrine against the denial of it by Nestorius.

From the time of the decree of the Council of Ephesus[1]

[1] In the year 431.

which condemned Nestorius, Christian art seized on the idea that had been presented to it by the orthodox decision, and devoted itself to representing the Virgin and Child. This group became the symbol of the *Theotokos* doctrine. And now there comes in a very significant coincidence. In her *Legends of the Madonna*, Mrs. Jameson observes: "It is worth remarking that Cyril, who was so influential in fixing the orthodox group, had passed the greater part of his life in Egypt, and must have been familiar with the Egyptian type of Isis nursing Horus.[1] Whether the patriarch was unconsciously influenced by the pagan symbol or not, we cannot compare the Egyptian picture which Mrs. Jameson has transferred to her pages with the Christian Madonna and Child without being struck by their startling resemblance. Even if the old pagan idea had no direct effect on Christian theology, there is every indication of its having given the pattern for Christian art. But when art is enlisted in the service of religion for the decoration of churches, it exerts a profound influence over the popular conceptions of truth through its appeal to imagination. No doubt it has in turn shaped and moulded the ideas of the worshipper concerning the Mother of God.

Then side by side with this exaltation of the Virgin came the increasing desire to seek her intercession; and this was furthered by other influences. The Christological controversies had many mischievous results; but none were more baleful than those that touched the love and trust of sorrowing sinful men and women for their Divine Saviour. In these contentions of the theologians the personality of Christ seemed to be dissolved by the very process that aimed at defining it. The Jesus of the gospels was fading out of sight, and in place of that gracious image a metaphysical abstraction in the form of the Christ of the creeds was taking its place. Just in proportion as the Church

[1] *Legends of the Madonna*, p. xxii.

attained to an explanation of Christ it lost sight of that in Him which would most surely win her love. How could people come with their sins and sorrows, their needs and cares, their hopes and fears to One who was being more and more resolved into a cold metaphysical abstraction? What the hearts of men and women yearned for was close human sympathy, touching and healing compassion. In place of that they were offered a formula of theology. This was the stone presented to the children who cried for bread. Is it wonderful that they turned elsewhere for comfort?

And when the Christ was regarded in a less metaphysical way, when His personality was affirmed and set forth with some emphasis, still this was not the personality of Jesus of Nazareth, the brother man who had hungered in the desert, and slept wearied in the Galilean fishing-boat. Still He was the Second Person in the mysterious Trinity, and the Divine Sovereign now exalted to glory, and some day to come in majesty for the judgment of the world. These are all Scriptural ideas, it will be said; but they are ideas which, taken by themselves, and permitted to oust the more winning human traits of the nature and character of our Lord, practically destroy the Incarnation and deprive the sinner of his Saviour. Cyril, with a mistaken notion of doing the more honour to Christ, explains away every indication of human limitations even in the life on earth, treating them as only apparent, in a docetic way, with the result that in his writings Jesus does not really appear as a man at all. He is presented as God disguising Himself to our eyes under the appearance of humanity, with a human body indeed, but with His mind so transformed that it can be regarded as in no true sense human.

But the hearts of men and women craved for a human Saviour. Hence the eagerness with which they turned to the intercession of the saints, who had fought the same battles that their struggling brothers and sisters were now engaged in. The saints could understand human tempta-

tion and human sorrow. To them then the appeal was made. Chief among the saints was the Blessed Virgin. Disappointed of the help they should have found in her Son because theology had removed him from the region of compassion, they turned to the pity of the glorified Woman. It might be thought that the exaltation of Mary would remove her also out of the reach of human sympathy, and indeed she too seemed to be in danger of fading away into the glory of pure divinity, dim with excess of radiance. But there was one thing that averted that fate. While the attribute of Divine vengeance was lodged in the Christ, it was never assigned to His mother. She was the embodiment of Divine grace, and of this without limit or qualifying influence. Herein is the fascination of the worship of the Virgin. Mary is regarded as infinitely compassionate, as overflowing with pity. People dreaded the wrath of the Son; they took refuge in the pity of the mother. Prayer to the Virgin is prayer that she will intercede with her angry Son on behalf of poor sinners who dare not approach Him more directly.

Now, we can understand how in those dark days that came on the world in the break up of the Roman Empire, amid the miseries that swept over Europe as wave after wave of barbarian invaders poured down from the northern forests and spread across the fair fields of the south, breaking hearts and despairing souls craved above all things some great and comforting compassion. They could not find this in the metaphysical Christ of the creeds; they thought they discerned only its opposite, Divine vengeance, in the exalted Christ who might be already the Judge standing at the door, about to come with flaming clouds to burn up the chaff in unquenchable fire. But Mary afforded the very Divine pity for which they thirsted.

Besides, these were the times when the new notion of chivalry was dawning on the world, with a promise of gentler manners and nobler aims; and it was of the very essence of chivalry to reverence woman. Chivalry was

always a dream. The days of chivalry only exist in the realms of romance and poetry. Yet as a dream it is an ideal. Never realised, it was still believed in. Was it not most natural that when such an idea was taking possession of the imagination of the secular world, the religious world should also have its chivalry? Though denied the exhilarating joys of joust and tournament, though deprived of the intoxication others found in the flashing eyes of fair ladies come to rain influence among rival combatants, priests and monks could cherish their holy chivalry in devotion to a woman, the thought of whom was as an inspiration. The passion of loyalty which Frances Ridley Havergal reveals in her hymns to Christ her King, pious churchmen of the middle ages displayed towards Mary their queen.

Though she was a queen, it was never forgotten that she was a mother; and her motherhood was appealed to for comfort and protection. Weary souls crept like tired children home to their mother to be soothed and pacified, forgétting that One had said, "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." In this strange oblivion to the most touching message of the gospel lies the pathos of the worship of the Virgin.

To the protestant mind this phase of Mariolatry must appear sentimental; it betrays the morbid spirit which always seems to threaten Catholic piety when the more robust virtues are neglected. The separation of compassion from justice, assigning the one as the exclusive attribute of the mother, and leaving the other for the Son, must always have an unwholesome effect, especially where it leads to a passionate devotion to the gentler grace, with a cowardly attempt to escape from any contact with the sterner quality. In a healthy religion, which is neither stoically hard nor weakly sentimental, justice and mercy must both have a place harmonised and mutually satisfied.

The source and nature of this adoration of the Virgin point to its cure. It is useless to denounce it with brutal violence as sheer idolatry. To the thoughtful Catholic

such a denunciation is unfair; to the ignorant Catholic it is cruel, for you would rob him by this process of his hope and trust and comfort without any compensation. It is much better to recover the true conception of Christ in His human brotherhood, to show that all the Catholic looks for in Mary may be found in Jesus, to bring out the rich compassion of the Saviour as that is revealed in the gospel story, and as it must be still moving His heart with pity for His sinful, sorrow-stricken brethren, since He is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." And if even this is not enough, if the tired children of men must crave for some motherhood in their religion, is it nothing to be able to reflect that the essence of this may be found in God? Theodore Parker set the fashion of calling God our Mother as well as our Father, and for a time his language was imitated by some preachers. But people felt it was fantastic, and the unscriptural term soon fell out of use. Yet there was a true idea behind it. Thus in *Isaiah* God says, "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, these may be forgot, yet will not I forget thee. Behold I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands,"[1] and again, "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you."[2] A psalmist sees in God's love a refuge that will outlast all human parental affection, exclaiming, "For my father and mother have forsaken me, but the Lord will take me up."[3] This is all in the Old Testament, where it is said we have the sterner views of God. In His revelation of the Divine Fatherhood, Jesus brings the parental relation of God before us with a new emphasis. Then should not God revealed to us in Christ, truly discerned and trusted, satisfy us with all the tenderness and compassion for which starved souls have turned to the comforting motherhood of Mary?

[1] *Isaiah* xlix. 15, 16. [2] *Ibid.* lxvi. 13.
[3] *Psalm* xxvii. 10, R.V.

CHAPTER V

Elizabeth—Motherhood and Humility

THE charm of the character of Elizabeth is that while she was called to be the mother of the foremost man of his day, the most powerful reformer, and greatest of prophets, she had the grace to allow that her son was destined to take a second place, himself but the forerunner of a greater One, in whose rising glory his fame was to fade and vanish. We admire the humility of John, who could say of Jesus, "He must increase, but I must decrease;" but even more remarkable is the humility of his mother who could acquiesce in such a destiny for her son from the first, and still bow before the higher destiny of Him whom a jealous woman would have regarded as the supplanter of her child. If it is difficult for a man to be humble on his own behalf, surely it is ten times more difficult for a mother to be humble in her expectations for her son. This was Elizabeth's duty, and she yielded to it without a shadow of complaint. We should like to know more than has been told us of such a woman; and the information that has reached us is worth the most careful study that we may extract from it as far as possible the secret of her lovely humility.

Elizabeth was a high-born lady, and she was married to a member of the Jewish nobility. St. Luke is careful to note these facts, calling attention to her pedigree as well as to the rank of her husband. Blood was highly esteemed among the Jews, even more highly than it is among our English county families, where a ducal house that is but of

yesterday is less honoured than a plain untitled family of ancient lineage. The priests were the aristocracy of Israel, and the bluest blood of all was that in the line of Aaron. Of this, the noblest family in Israel, Elizabeth was a daughter. It has been mistakenly assumed that Zacharias was the high-priest of his time, an inference drawn from the supposition that it was in the Holy of Holies on the great day of Atonement that he beheld his vision. But while this is an error, simply as a priest he was of noble rank. Therefore the union of the two might be called a marriage in high life. Let this be remembered when we are considering the rare humility of Elizabeth's conduct.

Though high in rank these two yet lacked the richest joy and greatest honour with which God favours a home. The merry laughter of children was not heard in their house. It is clear from what she said later that though Elizabeth may have borne the deprivation with quiet submission to the will of God her heart was desolate and empty, vainly hungering for motherhood. It is often said that Jewish women longed for children in the hope that they might give birth to the Messiah. Was this the only source of their craving? Have no mothers of other races, who have not had this motive, experienced the same deep hunger? Surely the cry for the privilege of maternity is an instinctive utterance of woman's nature. An artificial civilisation may suppress it; indolence, ambition, worldly interests may crush it down; in some cases the consciousness of a lofty mission may fill the place of it—a Boadicea taking her nation for her family, a Joan d'Arc consecrating her life to the saving of her people, a St. Catherine or a St. Teresa wedded to the service of her Lord, and treating those to whom she ministers as her children, may find in such vocations full vent for the emotions of motherly hearts. It cannot be denied that many a woman in less conspicuous places, as missionary abroad or helper of the needy at home, has so taken the people for whom

she has laboured into her heart that she has been a true mother to them; and unselfish sisters have risen to the same noble devotion in the home, and have had their reward in the peace that is given to those who forget themselves. And yet it remains true that the instinct of motherhood is one of the deepest facts of nature; when it is not supplanted by other interests, and the lonely woman sits in the silent home, while her husband is away fully occupied in affairs, she would be unnatural if she did not feel the desolation of childlessness. Even men, to whom parentage is not so profoundly absorbing a fact as it is to women, know what this desolation means. The most exquisitely pathetic of Charles Lamb's essays is his reverie on "Dream Children," wherein he describes how it seemed as though his little ones crept about him one evening, how they looked and behaved while he told them tales of the old days, and how they grew fainter to his view, seeming to say, "We are nothing; less than nothing, and dreams. We are only what might have been, and must wait upon the tedious shores of Lethe millions of ages before we have existence and a name."

But at length a great joy came to this childless house, and it woke up to a new life like the enchanted palace. The priest and his wife were well settled in years; the dream of a family had died down to a melancholy regret; others might have the wealth of home blessedness—sweet daughters, noble sons. Clearly, it seemed, such was not to be their happy lot. And then after all hope had been abandoned the wonder appeared. In these later years of their wedded life a son was born. A wonderful revelation preceded that joyful event; but this was for the father, and Elizabeth could only understand it as far as he, with the sign of his dumbness upon him, could make it known to her. It presaged a great future for the unborn child.

The birth of John is only less wonderful than the birth of Jesus. That it was distinctly a miracle perhaps we

should not say; but who now will have the hardihood to assert exactly what a miracle is? Nothing is more difficult than to define the borderland between the natural and the supernatural. In the Bible the two are not sharply distinguished; but this is on the very opposite grounds from the arid rationalism that minimised the Divine, with the conviction that everything is of God—what we call the natural as well as what we call the supernatural. Still, it had often been remarked in the history of Israel that children of promise came by a wonderful birth. In particular some of the most favoured of men were the late-born sons of parents who had long been childless. This was first seen in the story of the great founder of the Hebrew race. Abraham's faith, that faith which was expressly declared to be reckoned to him for righteousness, was his trust in God's promise that he and Sarah should have a child in their old age, a promise so amazing that when his wife heard of it she laughed, though whether from unbelief or joy we are not told; Manoah, too, and his wife were likewise favoured in late age by the gift of a son, the mighty Samson, who was destined to be the deliverer of his people; and Hanna, who wept in the temple distressed at the mockery of her childlessness by her cruel rival, was rewarded for her prayers by becoming the mother of Samuel, in whom as a seer the rare vision of God was restored to Israel.

In all these cases the lateness of the birth emphasised the fact that the children so marvellously ushered into the world were sent by God to serve some great purpose in His wise counsels. It was to be so with Elizabeth's son, who, as Zacharias had learnt in his vision at the altar, was the promised forerunner destined to come in the spirit and power of Elijah "to make ready for the Lord a people prepared for Him."

It is impossible to say how far Elizabeth, brought up in the faith of her fathers, could see into the mystery of this promise. She and her husband were faithful Jews assidu-

ously observing the customs of their people; and better than that, they had that inner righteousness which is pleasing to God — devout, upright people of blameless reputation. The best people usually come from worthy parentage. When we read the lives of good men we nearly always discover that they were the sons of good mothers. A man's biography, to be complete, must begin at his mother.

In those days of wondering expectation, when the wife was drawing near to the verge of motherhood, Elizabeth received a visit from her young kinswoman who lived in a remote country town far north in Galilee. We do not know how nearly they were related, nor how intimate they may have been previous to this occasion. It would seem from St. Luke's narrative that the new revelations of their mutual destinies, which had suddenly surprised them both, rather than the association of former days, now brought them together. In the awe and wonder of her overwhelming secret, the tremulous young maiden, so unexpectedly called to the highest destiny ever dreamed of by a woman, but in a manner most perplexing and trying to faith, seeks the older relative that she may pour out her heart's confidences. Such confidences would be very sacred; but they touched matters of profound interest to the world at large, and therefore the outer aspect of them has been preserved for us by the evangelist and clad in idyllic grace. We are now concerned with this as it is viewed from the standpoint of Elizabeth. And here it is that her rare grace of humility is displayed all unconsciously to itself, as humility always must be displayed if it is genuine.

Consider the disparity of their positions. Mary, it is true, was of royal lineage; but her family had fallen into humble circumstances. We have heard of descendants of the Plantagenets in England among the poorer classes of society. High as is the common reckoning of pedigree, so

long as there are the means for adequately supporting its dignity, when once it has fallen on evil days the world is quick to forget it. Mary's royal rank might be admitted in a heraldist's office; it would not count for much in that most worldly of spheres, "Society." But Elizabeth and her husband, while both of aristocratic lineage, were also practically and visibly of the higher classes, for Zacharias was in office as a priest, with his recognised functions at the temple. Thus the peasant girl was visiting a kinswoman in a very different social position from herself. And they may not have been very nearly related. It is a mistake to use the word "cousin" as was done by King James's translators; the revisers are more correct in their substitution of the more generic title "kinswoman." The fact that the two women were probably of different tribes suggests a collateral relationship, more or less remote, through marriage. Under these circumstances Mary might have been expected to have approached Elizabeth with the painful humility of a "poor relation," and Elizabeth might have been tempted to receive her in that graciously patronising style that seems to sit so easily on some ladies of the aristocracy—the more so since the priest's wife was the elder woman.

Such being the relative positions of the two, let us see how they meet. Elizabeth welcomes her visitor with a cry of joy. Her salutation is a glad benediction. From her own strange consciousness she at once recognises Mary's far superior privilege. It is Elizabeth, the elder woman, the highborn lady, the wife of a church dignitary, who calls aloud from a full heart to her lowly kinswoman, betrothed to a carpenter, "Blessed art thou among women!" Here is rare humility, self-forgetting and ungrudging. Elizabeth does not merely take the second place, she is perfectly enthusiastic over the young peasant girl's immeasurably higher honour.

There is even a more remarkable fact. When next

Elizabeth thinks of herself, it is to wonder at the honour that is put upon her in the fact that Mary has come to visit her. "And whence is this to *me*," she exclaims, "that the mother of my Lord should come unto me?" Could humility be more beautifully perfect than that? It is a rare sight and beautiful thus to see a lady of high breeding and rank giving honour to a young cottage maiden. But in this most exquisite utterance of the older woman's humility we have the explanation of the astonishing readiness with which she takes the second place for herself, so far below that of her young kinswoman. Mary is to be the mother of her Lord. Of course if that is admitted there can be no longer any possibility of Elizabeth thinking of maintaining her own higher rank in the presence of Mary. All earthly honours, privileges, dignities, sink into insignificance and shrink out of view as childish baubles before the Divine glory of the long-expected Christ now about to dawn. But the wonder is that Elizabeth grasped that amazing truth; for this shows that she had not been dazzled by her own singular privilege. That unexpected joy of her own had not spoilt her. She had not magnified it till it filled her heaven from horizon to zenith. She was wise enough to keep it in its right place, and to perceive that by its very nature her privilege must be inferior to another's. But how rare is this perception! The perfection of Elizabeth's humility is not her willingness to admit a certain superiority in privilege for her young relative; many a good woman would have the grace to do as much if she saw good reason. It lies in her complete acknowledgment of the infinitely higher nature and honour of the Child who was to be given to Mary above her own child. This is where the difficulty for a mother's humility comes in; and this is where the fine example of Aaron's noble descendant commands the admiration of all the ages.

It was her faith that led this good woman to take up

her attitude of humility; but it was her humility that made her faith possible. The two graces interact, as they always will. Neither is possible without the other. Humility without faith is in danger of losing its character as a Christian virtue, and falling into the condition of mere poverty of spirit or the craven fear that cowers before a bolder self-assertion on the part of another. That is a feeble and contemptible attitude of mind, sometimes confounded with humility, with the consequence that dishonour is done the genuine grace, so that to thoughtless observers this too appears to have an air of feebleness. Faith comes in to the aid of humility by opening up the vision of indubitably higher claims than any we can make the least pretension to, claims before which it would be simply ridiculous to set up our own in rivalry, and to yield to which therefore can be no mark of weakness, but only an acknowledgment of what is right and reasonable. He who believes in Christ with some adequate perception of the claims of his Lord can never dream of making a great demand on his own account. He finds himself deep down in the valley of humiliation when face to face with the Divine glory of the Holy One. This is a lesson in humility that every Christian is called on to learn. But Elizabeth's lesson was more difficult; for she had to apply it to her unborn son. Yet her joyous acknowledgment that Mary's child was to be none other than her Lord gave her at once the unhesitating consciousness that the son who had been promised to her with accompaniments of Divine wonders enough to turn the head of a less devout woman must assume quite a secondary place.

On the other hand these graces so interact that faith is only possible where there is room for the free growth of the lowly flower of humility. We are constantly forced to recognise that the supreme hindrance to faith, the fatal barrier to its progress, indeed, even the deadly poison in the atmosphere infected with which it is certain to sicken

and die, is pride. They who have Elizabeth's beautiful disposition are the most fitted to receive not visits only, but the abiding presence not of the mother, but of the Lord, the glorious Christ, Himself. To come down to Elizabeth's self-effacing lowliness is the way to receive her Lord into our hearts.

The faith that shines so conspicuously in her own character Elizabeth recognises in her young kinswoman. She blesses Mary for believing; for Mary had accepted the amazing promise that had been made to her, and when Elizabeth saw this she gladly acknowledged the grace as a ground of heartfelt congratulation. We meet with so much blindness to unobtrusive goodness, and so much churlish unwillingness to allow its merits even when they are perceived, so much more readiness to take up the role of the adverse critic and play the part of censor discovering the mote in our brother's eye, that when we come upon such a scene as this, with its cheerful, ungrudging recognition of gifts and graces, it is like finding an Elim with its wells and palm groves in the desert of worldly cynicism. It would be pleasant to linger over the spectacle of these two saintly women of the olden time in the sweet sanctity of their mutual confidences during those three months before Mary returned to her highland home, and Elizabeth was left to brood over the wonders of the future; but little is left with which to enlarge the picture to our imagination. Elizabeth had given her kinswoman a sort of prophetic assurance that her faith should not be disappointed. And Mary had obtained one object of her visit, an evidence of her faith. Each could tell what would confirm the other's confidence. This is just the way in which faith is best strengthened. A dull spiritual tone is too often the consequence of needless reticence and lack of confidence among truly Christian people. The enthusiasm that so richly endowed the early church with life and gladness was largely maintained by the warm

spirit of brotherhood; for this made the communion of saints a real fact, not a mere clause in a creed, the very meaning and application of which has become unintelligible to the majority of people. It was Elizabeth's noble salutation that roused Mary to the utterance of the *Magnificat.* Perhaps if it had not been for the older woman's words we should never have had this magnificent outburst of song.

Some think our Revisers might have printed the words of Elizabeth in metrical form as they have those of her kinswoman, for there is a lilt of poetry in them also. Then we should have read the two utterances as strophe and antistrophe. Again we might be led to ask the more curiously whether we have here the actual words of two women who, in the moment of high exaltation, were both inspired to converse in poetry and address one another in odes, or whether St. Luke may have given us the fruit of a later treatment of the scene in hymns of the early church. But the point of importance is that his narrative is a lifelike delineation of the whole situation. The mutual inspiration of the two women, their common exaltation of holy emotion, the encouragement of one another's faith and hope are brought before us in lifelike characters so as to exhibit their very distinct natures. Thus it is a noteworthy fact that while Elizabeth loses herself in a wondering admiration of the unspeakably greater privilege that has been conferred on the younger woman, Mary has no return of graceful language to offer to her hostess, to whom not the least allusion is made in the *Magnificat.* In justice to Mary it may be said that throughout this hymn is of a more general character, and is less directly adjusted to the circumstances of the moment than the words of Elizabeth that precede it. Still, if it is at all dramatically fitted to the circumstances in which it appears, undoubtedly it reveals a difference of mental attitude. May the explanation be that Mary was still

very young? In youth we are all too self-centred. As a rule delicate considerateness for the feelings of others is a choice acquisition that only comes with years, if it comes at all. We must not be hard on the young, and as yet undisciplined, maiden, if in the joy and wonder of the supreme privilege that had been given to her she did not quite sufficiently appreciate the beautiful self-suppression of her elder kinswoman, or acknowledge with becoming grace the singularly noble spirit in which her higher claims had been at once conceded; for we may be sure that Elizabeth would have been the last person to have made any complaint on that score. That she would have perceived it we cannot doubt, for she was a woman, and one endowed with finest, rarest perceptions, and her much longer experience had sharpened her faculties and widened her vision. But then if she did not push aside the thought at once as beneath her notice, in a large-minded charity of soul, she would only have smiled quietly to herself, just a little amused at the childish limitation of the mind of the peasant girl, who she would see quite clearly was perfectly unconscious of any deficiency in this matter, and had not the faintest intention of behaving with rudeness or superciliousness. The *Magnificat* itself is enough to exonerate her from any such accusation, for it springs out of amazed humility and rises to exultation just in proportion as Mary acknowledges herself to be a poor maiden, to whose low estate God has stooped in most wonderful condescension.

Perhaps we might add another consideration. After all, there is something in breeding. When manners take the place of morals and politeness does service for charity the hypocrisy of the situation is insufferable, and then the honest boorishness of a sound heart would be vastly preferable to this thin veneer laid on a nature that is essentially selfish and cynical. Yet in their place the courtly manners that lead one trained in them to be always

considerate of the feelings of others are worth acquiring; for they certainly avoid giving that needless pain which thoughtless people are constantly inflicting with dull indifference to the fact. We will not blame Mary; but we will permit ourselves to admire the finer grace of Elizabeth's manner.

It may be thought that any considerations of manners are beneath notice when we are face to face with the sublime topics that the interview between Mary and Elizabeth introduce to our attention. No thought of courtier or peasant, fine lady or cottage maiden, can affect the tremendous truth that the one was to be the mother of the great forerunner, and the other the mother of the Christ. These are the great facts of the story; to ignore them in pursuit of trivial hints or quite minor matters would show a miserable lack of the sense of proportion, and drag down the narrative from its exalted position as the gospel history. And yet in their place manners are not to be ignored, for when they are genuine expressions of feeling they are in some degree indicative of character. And since we are now fixing our eyes on one of these women, and that as regards her destiny by far the less important of the two, it is something to see how finely the grace of her humility sits upon her in the presence of the young peasant girl.

Vividly as Elizabeth is presented to our view in the one scene when Mary enters her house we soon loss sight of her, and we cannot even conjecture her future. Just once more she appears at the birth of her son. This is a time of great rejoicing among her friends and kinswomen. In most homes the advent of an infant produces some such pleasant commotion, but evidently St. Luke would have us see that there was an exceptionally jubilant celebration of the long-delayed event in the priest's house. Elizabeth had been so sadly disappointed in the hopes a married woman cherishes by nature, that the surprising

fulfilment of them after they had been quite abandoned was all the more an occasion for warm congratulations. But the story bears witness further to the high regard in which Elizabeth was held. The friends who come to congratulate her on this happy occasion are unfeignedly delighted at the blessing that has come to her. This is no cold, formal visit of state. An opportunity having come for honouring a woman who has won admiration and affection by her true goodness and the unaffected beauty of her character, it is seized with avidity and the very most is made of it.

Elizabeth has a part of no little interest at the ceremony in which a name is given to her child. It was supposed that he would be called after his father. What better name could be found for him than the honoured one born by the priest, a name famous in the annals of history in both priestly and prophetic connections? Surely then this boy should be another Zacharias, and if the wonder of his birth is a presage of a great future, he will do further honour to a name already honourable. "Not so," says his mother, "his name shall be John." He shall be called "God's favour." There is no family reason for choosing such a name. Yet Elizabeth is not to be overborne by the expostulations of her friends. This is not an idle fancy of hers. Evidently her husband has made her know that the new name must be adopted; and his interference now settles the matter.

This child of their later years turned out to be no fond home bird. As soon as he could escape from the necessary restraints of youth he sought the wilderness and lived the hard life of the recluse. We have not a word about Elizabeth in these later years. If she were still living she would have a mother's natural pride in the fame of her son when all the country was roused by the great reformer's preaching. Did she, now quite an aged woman, find her way down to the Jordan and stand among the excited crowds whom he moved so deeply with his prophetic

words? If that were the case, and if she lived on to the final tragedy, and news was brought to her of the banquet in the gloomy castle of Machaerus and its sequel—that ghastly scene which added its crowning horror to the neighbourhood of the Dead Sea—she too like her young kinswoman must have become a *Mater Dolorosa.* It is not always a happy fate for a woman to find herself the mother of a great man.

CHAPTER VI

Anna—Aged and Hopeful[1]

ANNA was an exceedingly aged woman. According to the lowest reckoning, that of our Authorised Version, she was eighty-four years old, a great age with us to-day, though so much has been done of late to lighten the weight of years by adding to their comforts, and in ancient times, which were not favoured with these comforts, a more remarkable length of life to have attained to. But there is good reason to think that the Revisers have more correctly rendered St. Luke's meaning in connecting the eighty-four years simply with Anna's widowhood—reading, "and she had been a widow for fourscore and four years." Previous to this she had lived seven years with her husband; supposing she was, according to Jewish custom, about fourteen years old when she was married, we have another twenty-one years to add, making her age, when she appears in the gospel history, no less than a hundred and five years. That would be a phenomenal age at any time.

Longevity, interesting as it is to the curious, and appealing as it does to sympathy and respectful treatment on the part of all of us, still requires some corresponding venerableness of character to justify its claims. The old age of Anna is doubly venerable because it crowns a life of devotion. All these eighty-four years of her widowhood she had spent in the temple; not indeed actually making it her abode, for that would never have been permitted to a woman, but still spending all possible time

[1] *Luke* ii. 36–38.

there—going up to it night and day. We cannot quite compare her with those vestal virgins of her own time who watched in the temple of Jupiter at Rome, or with the Christian women of later ages who devoted themselves to the religious life in convents; for Anna had been married. She had taken a matron's share in the duties of life, though but for a few years in a far-off past that must have seemed to her in these later days like a dream of another world. It was her widowhood that drove her to this life of devotion in the temple. The early loss of her husband was as the taking of the light of her eyes from her, so that thenceforth the fair world had no longer any charm. Spring might bloom; but it was not for her whose winter had come upon her in the May time of her life. And autumn might ripen its fruits; but the joys of the vintage festivals were not for one whose home had been made desolate for ever. Other Jewish women, widowed young, married again. Such was not Anna's way. For her the world had no more promise. Sorrow had claimed her as his bride.

And yet she did not sink in despair. She did not die of grief. Few meet that fate, though many have sought it. The reason for this is not, as cynical persons tell us, that sorrow is more easily forgotten than mourners imagine; it is rather that there is more capacity for enduring pain in human nature than any can believe until they have been put to the test. But Anna found a great antidote to sorrow in the surrender of her life to prayer; and in prayer she found health and peace. Through the long years of her widowhood—themselves constituting more than an average lifetime—she spent her whole time in prayers and fastings and vigils, till custom became second nature to her, and her life absolutely without change, quite abnormally uneventful, flowed on like a calm river slowly winding among green meadows, every new turn a repetition of its predecessors, the memory of the cataract near its source receding further and further into the distant past.

Stirring events happened in the world outside during the course of these many years of Anna's vigils in the temple. There was terrible war between the Asmonean brothers, Aristobulus and Hircanus, bringing a flood of misery over the land; and through all this eventful time Anna watched and prayed in the temple. The Roman legions came and camped on the hills round Jerusalem, and Pompey their general actually violated the sanctity of the holy place, penetrating into the innermost part of the temple; still she watched and prayed. Herod attained to the throne and his course was marked with war and murder and hateful crime; but Anna was still faithful to her post through all these days of blood and misery. She had spent half a lifetime in the temple when he began his wicked reign; and now that his long rule was over, its lurid horrors at length come to an end, Anna was still there, surviving all. One who could thus live through such scenes of change, without allowing any change to enter into her habits, would seem to be no longer a denizen of our noisy, restless world. Already, before its time, her life appears to have attained to some foretaste of the peace of that other world into which most can only enter through the dark gateway of death.

To some it may seem that this is by no means the ideal life. In our day the old controversy on the rival merits of the contemplative and the active life has been decisively settled in favour of the latter. The modern English saint is not Anna in the temple; she is the deaconess on her round of visits, the capable parish nurse, or the lady member of the Board of Guardians. It may be asserted that Anna was to blame for entirely devoting her life to worship in a world where there are always so many calls for serving God by work; but we do not know enough of her and her circumstances to be able to pass any judgment with regard to this matter. And even if it should be granted that she was too much of a quietist in those early days when she might be supposed to be strong and active,

this could not be said of her in the later time when we first make her acquaintance, for then she is of an age at which all would allow her to be exonerated from any further responsibility for the work of life. This is a privilege of age, one in which the peculiar peace that of right seems to belong to it resides. To be free to stand aside and see the busy rush of life as it sweeps past, no longer responsible for anything in it, must bring relief from the strain and a rare sense of calmness. Such was Anna's privilege now by right of her years. But the strange thing is that she did not avail herself of it, for she was keenly interested in a new event. Moreover, when she might well have rested entirely in her home she still kept up her long-continued habit, ascending the steps to the temple every day and spending all her time in worship in the sacred courts on into the night. That does not look like indolence. On the contrary, in one so very aged it indicates remarkable activity and energy.

Then is it possible to believe that she who displayed so much spirit in extreme old age had spent a life of indolence? The fact is, a life of devotion, if it is real and sincere, must be one of exceptional energy. There is nothing so exhausting as true prayer, especially if it be prayer of intercession for others. Such a profoundly spiritual act calls for strenuous effort in abstracting the thoughts from passing events, suppressing the rising fancies that perpetually invade the sanctuary of the mind, sympathising with the wants and troubles of the people whose cases are to be brought before God, above all realising His presence and trusting everything to Him with complete surrender, and yet with a full, intelligent appreciation of what is involved in so doing. Few of us can spend much time in such prayer as that; a life so occupied must be one of continuous spiritual exertion.

Of course much apparent devotion may be free from any such exertion, may even be quite idle. People who are

acquainted with monasticism from the inside tell us that the dull, unspiritual, vegetative existence that is satisfied with a round of formal devotions is only too common among monks, so that the cloister does not minister so much to real devotion as the spectator from the outside might suppose.

But the few verses that are all the sources we possess for any information about Anna are enough to show that she had not fallen into this miserable condition of soulless worship. She may have watched with interest the elaborate ceremonial of the temple-worship—the smoking sacrifices, the priests swinging their censers, the choirs of Levites chanting the liturgy or reciting the psalms of the Sweet Singer of Israel. But the language of our evangelist rather implies that her chief occupation was with her private prayers, for which the ample space and the quiet seclusion of the temple precincts, its courts and its porticoes, afforded her the best opportunities. This was the use of the temple which Jesus defended when as He drove out the traffickers He reminded the people of the ancient prophecy, "My house shall be called a house of prayer."

There are people to whom the church is just a religious theatre, its services sought after and indulged in for the stimulus they supply to a certain kind of delicious emotion; people who luxuriate in ritual or revel in sermons; people to whom mission services are fascinating luxuries, resorted to only for the excitement they produce, in some cases positively dangerous luxuries that really act as intoxicants, and must be taken in constantly increasing doses to satisfy the morbid craving too much indulgence in them has created. The unwholesome excitement which the Roman lady sought in the gladiatorial show, the religious devotee, if she is "evangelical," looks for in the revival meeting; if "ritualistic," in the ceremonial which can never be "high" enough to satisfy her. All this is as far from the strenuous intercessions of an Anna supplicating God

on behalf of her people, as dram-drinking from mountain climbing.

When we take a right view of Anna's prayers we are compelled to renounce the idea that she was neglecting her duty. Was it nothing to her people that this holy woman was pleading with God to send them redemption—for her action in the scene, where for a moment she appears in the gospel story, suggests that this was the great object of her assiduous prayers? If God hears and answers prayer, could such prayer as Anna's remain without fruit? Is it too much to suggest that Gabriel's visit to Mary was God's response to Anna's prayer? She had been praying for more than an average lifetime when this happened, and Jesus was born at "the fulness of the time." Can we think of anything more suited to bring the time of preparation to ripeness than such persistent prayer as this of Anna's—nearly a century of prayer—still persevering, though all the time the earth was as iron and the heavens were as brass, and not so much as a cloud as small as a man's hand was to be seen presaging the coming flood of blessing? Such prayer of faith could not count for nothing with the great Watcher of souls. But if the coming of the Christ was in any way the answer to Anna's prayer, who shall say that she spent all her days in the temple for nothing? Besides, with his love for pedigrees, St. Luke is careful to tell us that Anna was of the tribe of Asher, a curious fact to have preserved, for this was one of the lost ten tribes. Probably her prayers were specially devoted to the rescue of the most hopelessly lost sheep of the House of Israel. Then, herself of Northern extraction, perhaps sprung from a family that had remained in the land through all the changes of its history, she would be especially ready to welcome the news that the Christ had come in a family of Galilee.

Moreover, Anna was a prophetess. Her prayers had opened her eyes to things the prayerless never see; and

her long vigils in close communion with the other world had made her eloquent. At a time of life when people would look for nothing better than the garrulity of age, she had realised more than the ideal Milton cherished when he wrote in *Il Penseroso* of meditating,

> "Till old experience doth attain
> To something like prophetic strain."

It is not said that, like Simeon, Anna had received any revelation for herself concerning the coming of the expected Christ. But doubtless the old saint had communicated his message to his aged companion in devotion, and she had received it in faith, so that it became the theme of her prophesying.

This brings us to another most remarkable trait in the character of Anna. She lived in hope. Aged as she was she still cultivated the healthy habit of looking to the future. "Hope deferred" had not made her "heart sick." In spite of all the miseries of the times through which she had lived, and notwithstanding the long delay of God's answer to her prayer, she was one who clung to the noble faith that

> "The best is yet to be."

Such an attitude of mind transforms the whole character of old age. In his famous picture of all the world as a stage, the melancholy Jaques so describes the concluding scenes as to rob them of all dignity and leave nothing but a spectacle of unmitigated wretchedness, actually devoting two of the seven ages of man to decrepitude and decay, the sixth giving us "the lean and slipper'd pantaloon," while the

> "Last scene of all,
> That ends this strange eventful history,
> Is second childishness and mere oblivion."

We must not forget that Shakespeare expresses this melancholy view of life through the lips of a youth who

poses artificially as a sentimental pessimist. And yet it is not far from the conventional ideas accepted in former times. A purely worldly conception can scarcely be much brighter, for there is no denying that age is a time of increasing infirmity, the prospect of which can scarcely be in itself very cheerful. Paganism has little with which to relieve the deepening gloom of this descent into the valley. The pathos of Cicero's eloquent work, *De Senectute*, lies in the fact that while the writer tries to suggest what consolations he can find, the total impression he leaves on the mind of the reader is not reassuring. Even in the Old Testament Scriptures, although long life is there reckoned a sign of God's favour, and almost the greatest of blessings, the condition of the aged man is painted in gloomy colours; a Psalmist exclaims—

> "The days of our years are threescore years and ten,
> Or even by reason of strength fourscore years;
> Yet is their pride but labour and sorrow;
> For it is soon gone, and we fly away;"[1]

and the "Preacher" describes the miserable time when "the grasshopper shall be a burden."[2]

But now when we come to old age such as that of Simeon cherishing his revelation that he was not to die till he had seen the Lord's Christ, and Anna, who was old already while men and women now reckoned of good age were still in the prime of life, also buoyed up with hope, we find ourselves in an entirely different atmosphere. The melancholy of age has vanished, giving place to a cheerful serenity.

We are none of us older than our hearts. However great the number of years by which the duration of a life is reckoned, and even however real its increase of bodily infirmities may be, wherever the heart is young and hopeful, old age is really unknown. This is the essential

[1] *Psalm* xc. 10. [2] *Eccl.* xii. 5

difference between youth and age; youth looks forward, age backward. It has been said that when a man in going up hill stops every few yards to look back, that is a sure sign that he is already old. He who lives in the past is old, though his hair may not have turned grey. On the other hand, a wrinkled countenance, a stooping back, a shuffling gait, will not prove age if the life within is young, with interest in the future; nor will dates and figures settle the question. Bodies must needs fail with time and be laid aside like worn-out garments. But men and women are more than the clothes they put on in the morning of life to put off in the evening. Souls are not limited by the chronological boundaries that circumscribe the existence of bodies. As, alas, we may find souls blind and deaf, decrepit and quite worn out, in bodies that can be reckoned still young, so we may find youthful souls in old bodies—young tenants in old houses. Now there is nothing that keeps the life in a man so fresh as the happy faculty of taking a keen interest in the present concerns of the world, unless it be the rarer faculty of anticipating the future, looking forward to it and believing in it, "forgetting those things that are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before."

There is another aspect of this relation between age and hope. Anna's attitude of mind towards the future may in some way account for the extraordinary length of her life. When hope vanishes out of a life the spring of energy disappears, and it forthwith droops and fades. It is difficult to imagine that such a dreary, listless existence could be protracted a long way beyond the normal limits. Sorrow came to Anna early; and the subsequent course of her life may suggest that it never really left her. But sorrow had not brought despair. She did not abandon hope; she transferred it to other and larger objects than those which had come within the limits of her happier youthful experience. With no more room for hope concerning her own personal

enjoyment she lived for the greater part of her days in the pursuit of a grand hope for her people in the redemption that God was about to bring about, thus

> "Ever by a mighty hope,
> Pressing on and bearing up."

This vivifying influence of hope in Anna, defying and keeping back the natural oncoming of age and decay, was supported by another quickening influence. The way in which Anna spent her years was in itself a source of vigour. It was prophesied of old that, "Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall; but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint."[1] Did ever any put this promise to the test as Anna was now doing—for the space of eighty-four years assiduously waiting on the Lord? If there was truth in the ancient oracle, assuredly one who lived as she was living must have discovered it. And here is the sequel. Her strength was renewed beyond all ordinary experience. Spending her days close to the very fountain of Divine life, even her natural life was gifted with a most wonderful vigour. Perhaps this must not be pressed too far. Unhappily there is to be seen in the world that most odious of spectacles, godless old age, going down to the grave weighted with years but not with honours; and on the other hand there are many youthful saints among the blessed dead. We are all subject to physical limits which the spirit cannot transcend. Nevertheless it remains true that within these limits the spiritual has power over the material. No doubt the prophecy refers chiefly to spiritual strength; but for all that may be urged to the contrary, it still remains reasonable to conclude that such a life as that of Anna's, passed in constant communion

[1] *Isa.* xl. 30, 31.

with God, reached deep wells of energy unknown to those who live only on the surface and for the moment. Thus she realised the promise to her ancestor. It was to Asher the Patriarch gave the blessing, "As thy days, so shall thy strength be."[1]

Such then was the aged Anna as she appeared for a moment in the course of the gospel story. This was when Joseph and Mary had brought up the infant Jesus to present Him in the temple. Simeon first saw the child and took Him in his arms, blessing God that the promise of the revelation he had cherished in his bosom was at length fulfilled. Now he is ready for his *Nunc dimittis.* What more is there for him to live for? No redemption is yet effected. The Redeemer is but a helpless babe in His mother's arms. Any work that He might accomplish must still wait for years. But it is enough for the old man's faith that the Christ is born. The rest will follow. At that moment Anna comes in to her daily prayer. There is nothing to indicate that she expects this visit to differ in any material respects from any other of her visits to the house of prayer, now amounting to more than *thirty thousand.* One of the fatal consequences of long-continued custom is that it comes to regard itself as a sort of fate which must go on for ever as it has been from time immemorial. Anna's remarkable spirit of hopefulness saved her from sinking into this lethargy of habit. Still it is not to be supposed that she had any exceptional expectation when yet once again her aged feet mounted the temple steps and trod the pavement of the sacred enclosure. So much the greater must have been her joy in discovering that at last her long cherished, undying hope was to be realised.

Now we may naturally ask, How was it that these two old people at once recognised the child Jesus as the Christ of prophecy? The fanciful legends that encircle His infancy

[1] *Deut.* xxxiii. 25.

with startling wonders must be dismissed as the fruits of superstitious imagination. There was no golden nimbus about His head to distinguish Him from other infants, whom other mothers before Mary had brought up to present at the temple. What hosts of these Anna must have seen, generation after generation, till the daughters and the granddaughters and the great-granddaughters of those who had been brought in her earlier days came up with their children for a like recognition of God's claim upon them! In all these troops of infants, thousands upon thousands of them, no Christ had been discovered. Why then should the northern peasant's child be at once accepted as the expected One? To every mother her own child has its unique charm; but Anna was too old to be deceived by any fond illusion a young woman might entertain on that account. It is not likely that even her vast experience, gathered from so many years' observation of the mothers who came from to time to present their babes in the temple, would enable her to discern anything in the external semblance of Mary's child. Possibly Mary told both Simeon and Anna about the mysteries that accompanied His birth. Sacred as those mysteries were, and usually hidden in her breast only to be pondered by the awed mother in the secret of her own thoughts, she might see in these two aged souls, that scarcely seemed to belong to this world, fit confidants for her great secret. And yet it is scarcely likely. And even if she did tell them everything, there is still the question to be asked—How was it that they believed her at once?

Perhaps we should rather conclude that to both of these watchers in the temple, or it may be to Simeon alone, to whom a revelation had been given previously, there came an inward assurance, not to be denied, that here was the fulfilment of the glorious promise. That is the more likely since St. Luke expressly states that Simeon "came in the spirit into the temple." Thus he was prepared to see what

a man who was not in his inspired mood would have failed to discern. Then Anna was a prophetess; but still she may have gained her assurance from her fellow-worshipper, for it is remarkable that in both cases the specific Divine privilege is referred to Simeon. He it was to whom the promise was made; and now he it is who is "in the spirit," and thus, perhaps, is enabled to recognise the infant Christ. Neither of these things is affirmed of Anna. He is the seer; to him comes the revelation. Her part is prayer and giving thanks. If then she was equally assured and steadfast, hers we must allow was the greater faith, and therefore the greater blessedness Jesus promised to "them that have not seen and yet have believed."

However the assurance had been attained, and with regard to this matter we are left entirely to conjecture, the interesting fact remains, that both Simeon and Anna did receive the infant Jesus as the promised Christ. Here then is the answer to Anna's prayers. Her first impulse is to give thanks. Like Simeon, she is satisfied, though as yet no visible steps have been taken for the redemption of Israel. The Redeemer has come; then the rest must follow. Contrary to his custom on other occasions, St. Luke has not given us a hymn expressive of Anna's praises. Did she raise her aged voice in song in the sacred courts of the temple? However that may have been, we may be well assured it was no meagre half-hearted expression of praise to God that burst from her lips. In proportion to the long perseverance of her prayers, continued without intermission from youth to extreme old age, must have been the glad outburst of her gratitude when she perceived at this late end of her life that God had heard and answered them.

Anna did not keep this great discovery to herself. She went about spreading the news, though within a limited circle. No idle gossip, we may be sure, or she would not spend her life as she was doing in the seclusion of devotion, Anna would be listened to with attention. As a prophetess

she must be believed to have had the gift of speech in an exceptional degree. It seems not at all improbable that her devotions had been varied by the exercise of prophecy in the teaching and encouraging of her fellow-worshippers.

The people to whom Anna conveyed this glad news are significantly described by St. Luke as those "that were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem." Among such no doubt both Anna and Simeon should be classed. This was a group of devout souls united in their common hope of the Divine deliverance of their city. There is something more in their hope than the vague Messianic expectation which was in the minds of many at this time. Even that was ignored by the worldly Sadducees, as well as by the multitude of careless folk who always constitute so large a portion of society. But some were devoting themselves to their national hope with eager interest. The literature of this time, which has been recently brought to light, supplies striking testimony to the fact. The *Apocalypse of Baruch*—the *Book of Enoch*—the *Book of the Secrets of Enoch*—as well as the *Psalms of Solomon*, a century or more earlier—these works are all of them alive with the great hope. Possibly Anna and her friends were students of this literature. And yet it would be a mistake to suppose they were wholly its disciples, for a deeper note is sounded in our story than we often hear in the apocalyptic utterances. Those works indulge too freely in materialistic pictures of the grand future of the Jews. The devout Anna and others who sympathised with her, would surely have read a more profound and spiritual meaning into the word "Redemption," and it is likely their thoughts were fed more satisfactorily from the great teachings of the Prophets. Thus they were the continuation of the ancient "remnant," perpetuating the faith of the Patriarchs, the devotion of the Psalmists, the lofty spiritual thoughts of the Prophets—a living link between what was best in the old covenant and the new—the early seed-bed for converts to the Gospel—the first-fruits of the Kingdom of Heaven.

CHAPTER VII

The Woman of Samaria—Thirst[1]

It was the sultry noon of the Syrian day. The descent from the heights of Ephraim into the vale of Shechem was like entering an oven. The sun, now nearly overhead, allowed of no shadow from hill or rock, while it poured out the rays of an intolerable heat on the parched and baking ground. This was scarcely a time when people who considered their personal convenience would choose to be abroad in such a place. It would have been much more pleasant to take a *siesta* in a darkened chamber of one of the white houses that gleamed so brightly up against the slope of Mount Ebal on the farther side of the valley, or, if in hope of catching an afternoon breeze a little later, beneath the green shade of its vineclad verandah. Yet the solitary traveller seated himself out in the open on the stone slab of the famous well, bearing the name of the patriarch Jacob, in token of its traditional origin. His friends had left Him while they crossed the valley to the town of Sychar to buy food. He was too tired to accompany them; besides, that was needless, as they were to return for the mid-day meal by the well. So He sat there, waiting for them, just as He was, with no opportunity of bathing His feet or changing His clothing, after the manner of travellers in a hot country when they arrive at their destination.

He was thirsty, and He watched for the chance of some one coming to draw water, that he might ask her for some.

[1] *John* iv. 1–42.

It was not a very likely chance, for women choose the cool hours of morning or evening for their daily task; and then, as there were springs close to the town, it was hardly to be expected that anybody would pass them in order to obtain water from the more remote well, out in the middle of the valley. It was therefore a little surprising to see a woman coming down the deserted road, her pitcher on her head, evidently making for the well. Was it that she was dissatisfied with the nearer springs, and fancied that what she could get from this deeper source was cooler and sweeter? Her words a little later imply that she had a high opinion of the well, for she resented the suggestion that any other water could be better than what she was accustomed to fetch thence. Or was it that, with her shady reputation, she shrank from meeting her neighbours at the fountains they frequented, such an occasion corresponding in the East to the afternoon-tea among English ladies, as a centre of social gossip. For the same sad reason she may have deliberately avoided the hours at which other women would be in the streets, choosing the time when they were most deserted to creep out unobserved.

It somewhat startled her to see a man seated alone by the well, where at this time of the day at all events she might expect to be left to herself. She was more startled when He addressed her, begging the favour of a drink of water, for His dress showed Him to be a Jew. Now Jews would not object to buy and sell with Samaritans; they would trade with anybody to their own profit. At this very time the disciples had gone into the town to purchase provisions from the inhabitants, who, of course, were Samaritans. Shylock says, "I will buy with you, sell with you, talk with you, walk with you, and so following, but I will not eat with you, drink with you, nor pray with you." The "dealings" which the Jews refused to have with the Samaritans were rather those that indicated friendly intercourse. It would offend their pride to ask the smallest

favour of these despised people. We may be amazed at the power of a prejudice that would restrain a thirsty man from asking for a drop of water from a member of a race that his people had tabooed. But unhappily hatred will make people deny themselves almost as much as love; and when it is not personal, when it is racial, it can disguise its ugly features, by claiming the sacrifice as a duty, to deny which is mean and selfish. The tables are now turned, and the Jews are subject to a similar treatment in many parts of Christendom, the *Judenhetz* being cultivated as a sort of religion.

Thus the simple request that Jesus made to this woman was at once a revelation of His freedom from the narrow prejudices of His people. With people of an independent turn of mind the request for a favour sometimes meets with a more gracious reception than the offer of one. By asking her for some water, simple as His want was, Jesus threw Himself on this Samaritan woman's kindness. It is likely she would have received some proposal for her own benefit with some suspicion. But now the humble approach of the Stranger disarms hers, and she is a little prepared for further communications.

His next remark was one of profound significance, plunging at once into the heart of the most vital questions. Yet it was enigmatic, and though apparently it rose out of the immediate situation of the two at the well, and did not strike the woman as irrelevant, it was not easy for her to see the drift of it. He was telling her about some gift of God; how if only she knew it she would come to Him for it; for then the circumstances would be reversed, and she would ask Him for drink. What could He be talking about? Jesus could not mean that He would give her water from this well, in an act of courtesy like that of Moses when he assisted the daughters of Jethro in watering their flocks; for the well was deep—it has been ascertained that it went down at least seventy feet, and it

needed a long rope. The grooves in the slab at the top worn by the ropes by which the water-pots were drawn up may be seen in the present day. Jesus had no rope, and no bucket. How then could He give her water? Besides He had mentioned "living water," a phrase which commonly stood for a spring, or a flowing stream, in distinction from the stagnant water of a tank. Now it is a curious fact, ascertained by the Palestine Exploration Fund, that Jacob's well, which can now be identified without the least doubt, does not tap any spring, and therefore must be regarded as only a very deep tank, a receptacle for surface water from rains and floods. This is even suggested by its local name among the Samaritans, *Beer Jacub*—not *Ain*, which means a well of spring water, but *Beer*, which stands for a tank to hold rain-water. Thus the words of Jesus would seem on the surface of them to be a reflection on the well and indirectly on the patriarch who was credited with having dug it. And this His hearer resented—faithful to her ancestor if not to her husband.

It is not at all fair to complain of the foolishness of the woman in taking the words of Jesus literally. We know Him and His manner of speech, and we read this narrative in the gospel of St. John, where many more of His figurative utterances are recorded. But to this woman from Sychar He was just a stranger, a Jew travelling through the country, who was asking her for water. It is likely enough that anybody similarly situated would make the same mistake. How rare is it to meet with a person so constantly in communion with the spiritual world that his conversation naturally turns that way without the slightest effort! For most people it requires a complete wrench of the mind when immersed in the affairs of everyday life to suddenly turn their thoughts to the unseen and eternal. Most of us under the same circumstances would have taken the words of Jesus as literally as this woman took them.

Still the words of Jesus had not been wholly thrown

away on the Samaritan woman. They had roused her curiosity, and that was decidedly a point gained. The greatest barrier to the entrance of spiritual truth is sheer indifference. Like the earthworks that resist the bombardment of heavy artillery more effectually than granite walls, indifference buries and smothers the attack of ideas which would be strong enough to break through a very firm opposition. The wonder of this woman is now roused as to who the Stranger might be. There is just a little touch of scorn in her language as she asks Him whether He is greater than her father Jacob. Here she was back at the common ancestry of Jew and Samaritan, with a passing reminder that her people too had a claim on the patriarch in whom the Jews, with the narrowness of their pride, claimed exclusive ownership. Indeed, in this vale of Shechem the Samaritans seem to have had a prior claim. Living on the very spot where Jacob had dwelt, they were the descendants to whom he had left that local inheritance, as she takes care to suggest to the Jew stranger, by speaking of "*our* father Jacob which gave *us* the well." But while there is this tone of contempt in the woman's question, there is a louder note of surprise. He can be no ordinary man who speaks thus. His pretensions are preposterous, and yet in their very extravagance they excite a keen curiosity in the listener. This is a first step, the dawn of a new interest in one whose life had been a monotonous succession of disappointments. Although as yet we have had no opportunity of seeing any distance into the woman's character, her answer prepares us to discover as the conversation proceeds that we have here brought before us the picture of a quick and vivacious mind.

At the next stage, however, we meet with disappointment. Jesus proceeds to explain His words about the living water which He is prepared to give the woman if only she will ask Him for it. His water is quite different from that she is drawing up from the well,

because it gives permanent satisfaction; and besides it is not to be found in any external well—it is in a well within; and in springing up it issues in eternal life. Words such as these carry us far beneath the surface of life into profound mysteries, where truths of infinite value are contained, like precious gems in deep mines. Even if they were not at all comprehended, it would be impossible to listen to them attentively without perceiving that their drift was away from material things, that a literal interpretation of them was quite out of the question. How then could the woman be so obtuse as to ask for this water that she might be saved the trouble of coming out all the way to Jacob's well to draw? It has been pointed out that St. John is continually showing up the density of Christ's hearers and the perverse literalism of their interpretation of His most spiritual utterances. In the fourth gospel the people generally misunderstand Jesus and take His words in a lower sense than He intends. Nicodemus, for example, persists in applying His teaching about the new birth to natural birth.

But if even "the Teacher of Israel" could prove himself so dull and incapable of perceiving the spiritual meaning of the words of Jesus, we must not be hard on this Samaritan woman when we find her making a similar mistake. Still, though her stupidity may be not unpardonable, there was that in her reply that we cannot entirely excuse. The tone of it reveals petulance or flippancy. A well within indeed! By all means she will have this if the Stranger can give her such a boon; for it is a very tiresome thing to have to toil out there in the plain for every drop of water. But surely it is nonsense to suppose anything of the kind to be possible. We do not live in fairy-land. The good genii are not so accommodating as to offer their services in these dull days. We find ourselves in a very prosaic world—especially when by our own gross conduct we have robbed it of all its poetry.

But this petulance, or this flippancy, is only on the surface. Even when giving vent to it with the jauntiest air, the woman cannot entirely conceal her deeper feelings. A superficial pretence at frivolity is often only the flimsy veil people draw over restless emotions of a more serious nature. Jesus had promised a water that would effectually quench thirst. His hearer chose to take the offer quite literally; perhaps she did not at first detect the least gleam of any deeper meaning in it. Still the very mention of the word "thirst" was arresting. There is a certain awakening in the opening words of the woman's reply—"Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not;" though it is disappointing to see how she falls off in the concluding phrase about being saved the trouble of coming to Jacob's well. Perhaps that is just a bit of her provoking perverseness. She will not let it be seen that her heart is at all moved, though in spite of herself the respectful title she now uses for the first time is almost a hint that some impression is made. If only we could forget that unfortunate touch of flippancy at the end, we should certainly infer that some serious desire was aroused in this poor blighted soul. When we take the sentence in its entirety the effect is rather bewildering. What does the woman really mean? Most likely she scarcely knows herself. Her language is in confusion, because her thought is confused.

Still though her words are hasty and unreasonable, and therefore not to be pressed very far, the mood they reveal in her begins to open our eyes. The language of Jesus does so more effectually. If she did not know what she was saying, or how to take His remarks, He was quite clear in His purpose, and the offer He made her showed His perception of her real need. With that keen vision of His, penetrating all disguises and reading the deepest secrets of the heart, Jesus at once detected the sad unrest that was troubling the woman in spite of her flighty

manners. Those foolish manners were but further proofs, if such were needed, that the soul within was not at peace. Her life, so wild and wayward, so scandalously lawless, so recklessly defiant of all social restraints, was not to be treated as the absolutely abandoned career of one who loved sin and deliberately chose it for its own sake. All this disgraceful conduct, bad as it was in the sight of God and man, must be regarded as the despairing refuge of a weary, disappointed soul. So at first Jesus said no word about her sin; He went straight for what lay behind it, the trouble of a soul that had not found its rest.

It was not easy for the woman to comprehend Christ's meaning. He had brought a key to unlock a chamber that had long been closed and sealed, and was now almost forgotten. He was beginning to sound a chord that had been silent to her for years. As she listened, strange dim memories began to stir in hidden depths of her being where they had lain for many a long day unheeded. She could not deny that her soul was athirst; though this was the very truth she would never admit to herself while she was hurrying on from one excitement to another, never satisfied, never at peace, but never pausing to think. How dared she think? If one bade her do so she might well reply, "That way madness lies." She was one of those feverish souls who drown thought in excitement. But for this excitement she must have continuous change. A monotonous life, even though it started in a way that was to her mind, would soon pall and grow stale and unbearable. Novelties, new excitements, fresh adventures, these unwholesome experiences had become the very necessities of her being. She was like the victim of intoxication, who cannot endure the flat intervals when the cup is laid aside, and must be taking stronger and yet stronger doses of the poison that is eating his life away, simply as he thinks to keep himself alive. Morality is scorned, respectability flung to the winds, common decency

trampled in the mire, and the soul hurled down into folly and vice, from no original love of evil for its own sake, and not at all because it is thought to be desirable to abandon one's self freely to a scandalous course of sin. The explanation is that having gone wrong once, and not possessing strength and courage to turn round and begin again a better life in the humility of contrition, the soiled soul now sees no alternative but to plunge deeper and deeper in the dark gulf of iniquity, with the vain hope that since conscience can never be pacified, it may be drowned. This is the secret of many a headlong career of wickedness. The voice of conscience is unendurable; therefore the troublesome mentor must be stifled, must be murdered.

But conscience dies hard. It is not at all easy to commit the unpardonable sin. The Divine in the soul may be reduced to a mere spark and yet it will not be quickly quenched. There is so much of the image of God in all of us that the descent to the purely brutal or the absolutely diabolical is further than we imagine. Herein lies the hope for the redemption of the most abandoned. Now, it is at once a sign of our Lord's tact in dealing with souls, and an indication of the great kindness of His heart, that He did not approach this woman through her guilt, that He approached her through her need; for He had come not to condemn, but to save.

Then the awakening of need is followed by the awakening of conscience. Jesus makes a very simple suggestion. Will she go and fetch her husband? It is like a rapier-thrust piercing her to the quick. There is a man who passes as her husband. It would be very easy to call him. What would the Stranger know? But she cannot do it. Half an hour ago this would have been the simplest thing in the world. It would have seemed quite comic to pose as a highly respectable matron before this grave Stranger. But not now. Already this woman is coming to a new way of looking at things. In spite of all her efforts at suppres-

sion conscience is awake. She dare not dissemble. All her old effrontery quails before the penetrating gaze of the Stranger. There is no holding on to a lie before those clear calm eyes. "I have no husband," she falters. It is a simple enough statement. But it is not spoken in virginal innocency. The colour rushes to her cheeks, her eyes drop to the ground, she turns away her face, her voice is low and hesitating. Innocent words, but stained crimson with the tones of guilt.

The very plain words with which Jesus meets this honest avowal tear the last rag of pretence from off her character. She has had five husbands; then he whom she now has cannot be a husband. It was a terrible exposure—the ugly story of her life spread out before her as with a sudden flash of light. Five! Hideous arithmetic! She had scarcely paused to work the sum. But it was correct, she knew. And the revelation had come to her from the lips of this strange Jew. How had He discovered her secret? Or if it were no secret in her town, still how could He, a mere passing visitor, know it so exactly? Attempts have been made to explain away these words of Jesus on the suggestion that they are allegorical, and refer to five religions successively adopted by the Samaritans. Such fantastic devices of hypercriticism only declare the absolute blindness of their too ingenious inventors to the intense realism of the narrative. There is no story in the Bible that speaks for its own veracity by every feature of it with more certainty than St. John's account of the woman of Samaria. If this is not history we have no history in the New Testament. Appalling as is the dissoluteness of morals that is here made manifest, it is not beyond what we are forced to believe even of provincial life in the corrupt Roman Empire of the first century. Historians concur with satirists in describing the ominous slackening of the marriage tie and the everyday occurrence of divorce at Rome. The mordant pen of Tacitus

and the lashing wit of Juvenal bear out Seneca's grave statement that there were "women who reckoned the years by the number of their husbands." No doubt things were at their worst nearest to the court; but the poison was spreading through the provinces. The New Testament is not without evidence of the existence of this fatal solvent of society among the Jews. Jesus severely rebuked the rabbis for their official recognition of the now common freedom of divorce. But if such was the case in the land of Israel, is it at all surprising that the same breakdown of the first principles of orderly morality should be found among the laxer people of Samaria?

Nevertheless, possible as such conduct as that of the woman of Samaria was in these corrupt times, we may reasonably suppose that for a dweller in a remote country town, far away from the dissolute fashionable world, to behave in this manner was exceptionally scandalous. It is therefore the more remarkable that Jesus not only did not shrink from entering into conversation with her, but lavished on this one auditor some of the choicest of His utterances. We may be too fearful of the risk of casting our pearls before swine. It is a fatal defect for any speaker to despise his hearers. Every audience, however small—though it consist of but a single person, however low—though it be gathered from the gutter, since it is human, has a right to the very best that is in a man. That best may vary in form, and of course it should be adjusted to the listener's capacities. But the example of Jesus teaches us that no truth is in itself too good for presentation to the most unworthy character, if only it can be effectually presented. Those that have fallen lowest need all the more for that very fact the lifting power of what is highest.

To the Samaritan woman the first thing of note was the amazing discernment of this Stranger. It might have been well if, for the moment, she had thought more of

what He had said than of the mere marvel of His being able to say it. Here is her unfortunate infirmity. She can never stay long enough at one point to appreciate it and make the right use of what it suggests. She is quick-witted in a way, though seemingly so dense in the perception of metaphor and allusion. She seizes a point in a moment, and for that moment it interests her; but the next moment a fresh turn in the conversation carries her right away to some entirely different topic. This unfortunate habit may be the result of her restless, changeable life. Or shall we say that the temptation to that unhappy life sprang from her want of fixity in general? She is the type of the inconstant, and her inconstancy is seen in lesser passages of life as well as in its great movements and their vital crises.

Such an unhappy habit of mind renders it not at all easy for us to weigh and measure the character of which it is a trait. It is changeable as a chameleon, passing from grave to gay with the abruptness of an April day. You cannot tell when it is serious. The demure sentence may be only a cloak for some frivolous fancy; but then the light phrase may veil the sudden flash of an earnest thought. Thus while this woman lives on the graphic page of the evangelist as though she were with us to-day, we are quite unable to tell how deeply her soul was moved in her conversation with Jesus by the well. He had made some impression; of that we may be sure. A startled consciousness of guilt and a vague soul thirst were roused in her as they had not been roused for years, but whether only in an impressionable moment to be soon smothered by a crowd of fresh interests and excitements we have no means of saying.

The unhappy versatility of this woman's mind is illustrated by the next turn of the conversation. The sudden revelation of His knowledge of her whole life story by the unknown Jew startles her greatly, as well it may. For

the moment she thinks no more of herself, her thirst and her guilt. She perceives that the Speaker is no ordinary man. He must be a prophet to read secrets in this way. Then here is her opportunity. He shall settle the long-standing controversy between Jew and Samaritan as to which is the right hill for the worship of God. Is it Gerizim? or is it Moriah? The Samaritans had their temple on the one hill, the Jews theirs on the other. The question would seem to be suitable for the occasion, for they were met almost under the shadow of the Samaritan sacred hill—"this mountain," says the woman, looking up at it and pointing to its steep slopes. So stubborn was the controversy to which she thus suddenly refers that it has been preserved down to our own day, and at the present time the traveller through Palestine may see the remnant of the Samaritan sect at Nablous still sacrificing their Paschal lamb on this same sacred height.

The woman had often heard of the Jewish heresy; but she was shrewd enough to suspect that the truth was not necessarily with her people. An emancipated woman as regards social custom and morals, she was prepared for a little daring freedom in theology, and quite open to conviction from the new light. Besides, this was a chance of another new sensation. It would be quite delicious to have a change from the old humdrum ways of her fathers authorised by a genuine prophet. At all events it would be something to get that tiresome controversy settled once for all.

In the case of such an erratic personage, ready to fly off at a tangent after some new interest every other minute, it is impossible to say how far she might be in earnest. Perhaps she did not care a straw for the question, only raising it as a convenient method of turning the conversation which was becoming much too personal to please her. And yet the great and ever memorable answer of Jesus suggests that she did honestly seek light on a

vexatious difficulty. In that case we must reckon her one who, though indifferent to practical morals, is interested in theological orthodoxy, one who, while outraging the first principles of right conduct, is anxious to be correct in the ritual of religion. That is a type of character not altogether unknown in Christian times. One would have thought that Jesus would have been indignant at such an attitude of mind, in the manner of Isaiah when he denounced the scrupulous observance of New Moons and Sabbaths and the trampling of the holy courts of the temple by men whose lives were vile.[1] But He chose another method of reply, giving to this woman of all people the most sublime truth about spiritual worship that has ever been uttered. He must have seen that there was a hope of rescuing her by the presentation to her of the very choicest of His teachings. Whether she rose to her privilege we cannot say. It would seem that His great words went over her head and only perplexed her. With a little shrug of disappointment she resigns herself to the conclusion that, since her new prophet could not settle the question, she must wait for the coming of the Christ. To her amazement the stranger calmly declares that He is the Christ! and she believes Him. Then He has won her faith in some real way.

It is something in her favour that she immediately ran back to the town, leaving her pitcher at the well, forgetful of the very errand that had brought her there, in a characteristic absorption with a new idea. She effected a great work in bringing her neighbours to Jesus, and it is to her credit that she did not stay to think the report with which she roused them involved a subject by no means to her credit. Still we leave her with some misgivings when we see, of all the wonderful things Jesus has said to her, what most impresses her is still the marvel of His knowledge. It is not "Come and receive from One

[1] *Isa.* i. 10–15.

who will quench your thirst with the water of life;"—not "Come and listen to One who will teach you the greatest truth about God and His worship;"—but just "Come see a man which told me all things which ever I did." Yet there is the added inference, "Is not this the Christ?" She was convinced of that great truth, and she was the means of bringing her fellow-townspeople to hear Him for themselves. Seldom has the world seen a more unpromising evangelist, and seldom has it met with a more successful one. Truly the treasure is in earthen vessels; but the excellency of the power is not of man but of God. And after all, is not the best that any evangelist can do just what this woman accomplished so successfully—not to make any great impression on his own account, nor to reckon on any weight in his own merits, but simply to show the way to Christ, from whom alone all truth and life can be received?

CHAPTER VIII

The Women who Ministered to Jesus—Active Devotion

THE freedom enjoyed by women among the Jews, in contrast to the degradation and miserable servitude that is their lot in most Eastern countries, evident throughout Bible history, is most conspicuous in the gospel narratives. This is not only the case with the poor among whom our Lord generally lived—for whom necessity breaks many of the bands of social restraint. Ladies of wealth and position are found in the group of His most constant followers, and it was by means of their gifts that His temporal wants were supplied. No scandal appears to have been raised on this account as on the ground that Jesus ate and drank with publicans and sinners; and therefore it is reasonable to conclude that it was not regarded as unseemly or unusual, and the liberty thus manifested must be set down to Jewish custom, not to the innovations of Christianity. But the spirit of the new era introduced by Jesus Christ elevated and enlarged this custom. Not the least of the blessings of the gospel consists in its bringing justice to womanhood. In Christ's action and teaching there is nothing but what agrees with the social, moral, and religious equality of man and woman.

Our Lord's relations with the women who attended Him are distinct from His relations with the men disciples in one very remarkable particular. He ministered to the men; but the women ministered to Him. In their case Jesus consented to receive gifts and service. Thus theirs was the higher honour among His followers.

The first instance of the ministry of woman after Jesus had commenced His public work is of the simplest kind, and it affords a glimpse into the happy relations in which He lived with humble folk.[1] He had been teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum on a Sabbath day, and there He had healed a demoniac. Then St. Peter took Him to his own home, where it was discovered that the fisherman's wife's mother, who apparently had been left in charge of the house, had been taken with a fever, no doubt just such a malarious attack as would be common in the hot, steaming valley by the shores of Genesaret. No mention is made of the daughter, St. Peter's wife. Possibly she had been at the synagogue service. It may be, however, that she was no longer living. If that should be the case it would not help the argument for a celibate priesthood in the Christian Church; because we learn from St. Paul that some years later St. Peter had a wife who was in the habit of accompanying him on his travels.[2] If, therefore, the apostle was a widower when Jesus went to his house, he must have married a second time later in his life, a still more glaring offence in the eyes of the Hildebrand school than that of having retained the wife of his youth. Take it how you will, there is no escape from the plain inference that rises out of the New Testament statements and points to the fact that the apostle to whom the Church of Rome looks up as its head and founder was a married man. Clement of Alexandria, writing at the end of the second century, says that Peter's wife helped him in ministering to women—as the missionary's wife so often becomes thus a second missionary. He also states that Peter had children.[3]

It would seem then that the older woman was an energetic person who actively concerned herself with her daughter's household affairs. We may even venture on the conjecture that anxiety to do her very best for her

[1] *Matt.* viii. 14, 15; *Mark* i. 29–31; *Luke* iv. 38, 39.
[2] 1 *Cor.* ix. 5.
[3] *Strom.* iii. 6.

Guest, and the labour thus incurred in the heat of the day, helped to bring on the fever. For a woman, perhaps somewhat advanced in life and readily fatigued, to be working with unusual assiduity at mid-day in that hot, damp climate, was likely enough to bring her into a condition especially liable to succumb to the local malaria.

If this were the case how doubly distressed she must have been when laid aside at such an inopportune moment. What woman of an active disposition, intent on hospitality, but would have considered the untimely collapse as most "aggravating"? Thus the circumstances of her illness would tend to increase the severity of its symptoms. St. Luke, with the exactness of a physician, tells us that it was a "great fever" from which she was suffering,[1] perhaps alluding to the technical division of fevers into two classes, the "great" and the "slight," which he had learnt from his text-book, *Galen.* Apart from any conjectures as to the source of the fever, we may be sure that such a person as this woman seems to be, on the evidence of her conduct directly after she was healed, must have been greatly vexed with herself for falling ill just when she would like to have been at her very best to do honour to the Prophet to whom her son-in-law had devoted his life. Like most active people she would probably suppose that nobody else could take her place. What was to become of the meal she had been preparing? And what would Peter say? Was it not provoking? And so the poor woman lies and frets herself into a worse fever. For lie she must. It is perfectly impossible to fight against one of these fierce attacks of malaria. The collapse is total. In an hour it flings the strongest person into the most helpless condition, perhaps into raging delirium.

This woman had to learn the hardest lesson set for the energetic, that

"They also serve who only stand and wait."

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[1] *Luke* iv. 38.

Not even standing, but helplessly prostrate, she was to be the means of helping the work of Christ most wonderfully. It is something to discover that we cannot only follow Christ as His servants, offering Him the homage of our hearts and the sacrifice of our work. Primarily He is not the Master; He is the Saviour. Would we be always serving? May not this mean a little unconscious pride? We must be brought low into a state of absolute helplessness, where, while we can do nothing for Christ, we may discover that Christ can do everything for us.

When the family party returned from the synagogue they discovered the untoward event, the illness of the good woman who had been left in charge of the house. In our oldest account we simply read that they told Jesus of it, apparently with an apologetic purpose to account for the sufferer's absence, and to explain the unfortunate delay it must have occasioned in the preparation of the evening meal, and from this narrative it would appear that our Lord's action in healing the woman was entirely of His own initiative. St. Luke, however, says that they besought Him to help them in their trouble. That they definitely expected a miracle thus early in His ministry is not very probable, though the cure of the demoniac in the synagogue just before may have raised some vague hopes that He might do something. It is St. Luke again who tells us that Jesus rebuked the fever as though it were an evil spirit. This is according to that evangelist's style. The action of Jesus is narrated more simply in St. Mark's more primitive account, as also it is in St. Matthew's, where we read that Jesus took the woman by the hand and raised her up. But all accounts are agreed in making it clear that the fever left her, and that the cure was both immediate and complete. This is Christ's first miracle of healing disease. It is very characteristic in its simple majesty. There is no agony of invocation, no evidence of great strain or effort, but a consciousness of absolute mastery, a serene

assurance that what is desired will be accomplished, that is to say, perfect faith on Christ's side. Yet we must not suppose that a miracle cost Him nothing. It cost Him much in sympathy, for we often read of the motive behind one that "He was moved with compassion." It also cost Him not a little in the exercise of will power. That "I will" of His of which we read on one occasion[1] meant an expenditure of energy. He was giving Himself in His cures and bearing the infirmities of the sufferers as His own burden. Some such sacrifice we may believe He made on this first occasion, at the cure of Peter's wife's mother. He gave Himself, in profound sympathy and the exercise of strong will power, for the healing of her. And the result was a perfect cure.

Then the evangelists add the interesting touch from which we glean all we really know about the character of this woman. She rose and ministered to Jesus and His friends. This is often commented on as a proof of the completeness of the cure. And of course it is that. Fever is a peculiarly exhausting condition; and when it is over it leaves the patient in a state of utter prostration, the pulse, which had been bounding at a fierce pace, sometimes sinking dangerously low, the heart being much enfeebled by the strain that has been put upon it. For a woman just recovered from a severe attack of malarial fever to get up in a moment and go about her household duties as though nothing had happened was simply marvellous. Very likely this is why the evangelists record the fact. Nevertheless for us, in our study of its subject, it has also other suggestions. Some people would have claimed the privileges of the invalid. Convalescence may be a very pleasant time when everybody is expected to be considerate, and all sorts of nice little favours may be exacted. Have we not known the sentimental convalescent, not altogether exempt from selfishness, and perhaps a trifle hypocritical—

[1] *Mark* i. 41.

for whom it will not do to seem to be getting well too fast? Such a person may become not a little trying to the patience of friends who were willing to give the most assiduous nursing quite ungrudgingly in the crisis of real danger.

Peter's wife's mother indulges in no such nonsense. A plain, practical, matter-of-fact woman, she feels well enough to work. Then why should not she set to at once without any ado? Hers is the sort of service we may rest assured Jesus Christ most delights in. She would not dream of attempting to compose a second *Magnificat*—a hymn in the praise of her Healer—and yet next to His mother might not she have regarded herself as the most honoured of all women, for as yet she was the only woman on whom He had exercised His marvellous powers of healing? We would not look for poetry from the fisherman's mother-in-law, except in so far as her willing service under such circumstances as these is itself a poem. To do the commonplace thing because it is obviously desirable that it should be done, and because one is of a simple and honest heart, when abundant excuses might be found for avoiding it and posing as a person of some importance, is itself a mark of true nobility of character. Thus there may be sublimity in the commonplace, while the seizing of any excuse to escape from it is a sign of pettiness and essential vulgarity of mind.

Then it is to be considered that Peter's wife's mother had fresh motives for serving Christ, which she had not known before her illness. She had received in her own experience a marvellous revelation of His power. But better than that, to her at least, was the thought that she had received from Him a mark of greatest kindness. She had thought of Him as her Guest before; now He is her Friend, her Helper, and in some sense, the full meaning of which she will learn later, her Saviour. Therefore henceforth any service she can render Him will be

intelligent with some knowledge of His worth, and doubly affectionate in gratitude for His goodness. This is the secret of true Christian service. It is the service of gratitude. And just in proportion as the grace received from Christ is recognised will be the warmth of the desire to render some token of devotion to Him. This is why it is a mistake to insist absolutely on the duty of Christian service. We can never serve aright until our enthusiasm is kindled by the supreme motive for service. Evangelical teaching is no distraction from Christian work; it is its strongest inspiration.

But the converse of all this is equally true. There is nothing but the most odious ingratitude in seeking the highest favours from Christ, and forgetting to avail ourselves of any opportunities for rendering service to Him. In the case of this woman we have the normal process, the typical example, in its simplest form—deliverance by Christ immediately followed by service to Christ.

One more point may be noted in regard to the special circumstance of the incident. St. Peter had just given up his fishing, left his boats and his nets, to devote himself to the exclusive service of the new Teacher. Now if there was one person who might very naturally have blamed him for doing so, that person was his wife's mother. His wife might have borne it out of love and dutiful submission, and in a gracious spirit of self-suppression; but for the mother to see her daughter subjected to the treatment such conduct must involve—was it not a little trying? Now, if ever, was there an excuse for a mother-in-law to interfere with a man's arrangements and show some asperity of protest. What folly! What madness! Nay, what culpable disregard for family claims! This man had taken her daughter into his charge; then what right had he to break up his home on some plea of religious fanaticism? In point of fact, it does not appear that Peter's wife was brought to want through her husband's action at this time.

But could her mother foresee a safe way out of the difficulty which apparently stared the household in the face when the head of it suddenly announced his intention to give up what had been hitherto their means of livelihood?

If such very natural thoughts had been in her mind, and Jesus had perceived them, He may have felt the more compassion for her considering that her maternal anxiety might have helped to bring on the fever.

But now that she is cured she can look at the case in a different light. Having a new ground for faith in the new Teacher, she is prepared to face the future with a more cheerful countenance. And here we part company with her. She comes but once on to the page of history, there to serve a double purpose—first to be the means of showing forth the goodness and glory of Christ in this quiet homely scene at the fisherman's cottage, and then to be the example for all time for the service of gratitude! Hers was the simplest ministry, woman's commonest task; yet since it was just the work that lay to her hand, it was all that could be expected from her. Happily this is a form of service in which many can follow her cheerful example. The fisherman's hut has vanished; Capernaum is a wilderness; these simple folk are of the olden time, far back in the past; it is not for us to hear the tread of the footstep of Jesus on our threshold; He does not appear seated at our table and breaking bread in our midst. Yet the grateful task of Peter's wife's mother is open to be taken up by any lowly woman to-day, for has not the Master said, "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye did it unto Me?"

The other cases in connection with which we read of women ministering to Jesus are of a different character. St. Luke tells us that in addition to the Twelve, Jesus was accompanied on His travels by certain "women which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary that was

called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto Him of their substance."[1] Towards the end of his gospel St. Mark also refers to certain women "who when He was in Galilee followed Him, and ministered unto Him," distinguishing these from others who were simply disciples—"the many other women which came up with Him unto Jerusalem."[2] St. Matthew also in the same connection refers to "many women . . . which had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto Him."[3] Taken together, these three passages imply that Jesus was especially cared for by a number of women, that it was women who provided for the temporal wants both of Himself and of His apostles.

Here then we see a considerable number of persons of means contributing to the common fund out of which the simple wants of Jesus and His disciples were supplied. We learn from Jerome that it was customary for Jewish women to contribute to the support of rabbis.[4] Our Lord had no fixed place of abode; plainly He was feeling the pain of homelessness when He said to one who was overhasty in offering to follow Him wherever He went, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the heaven have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." We know that He often spent the night out among the mountains. Still there is no reason to think that He ever suffered from actual want. He had no sure income; but He who taught His disciples not to be anxious for the morrow had no such anxiety, knowing His Father would provide. And yet it is a mark of His humiliation that His livelihood was obtained in the precarious way of contributions to a common bag. But He was not above accepting such offerings. It was reasonable and right that they should be made. He gave infinitely more than the

[1] *Luke* viii. 2, 3.
[2] *Mark* xv. 40, 41.
[3] *Matt.* xxvii. 55.
[4] On 1 *Cor.* ix. 5.

wealthiest of His disciples could ever return to Him. Jesus made no charge for His cures. His healing was free, and so was His teaching. Even the thank-offerings of devout disciples were never conceived of in the sordid spirit of barter. If such had been the case He would not have taken them. They were just gifts of love, expressions of devotion. At the same time they had a practical character. They were of a different order from Mary's costly ointment. That represented the poetry of devotion; these offerings, its prose; and devotion must have its prosaic side. It is the disregard of this that often makes religion an unreal thing of empty sentiment. People must learn to consider practical necessities even in their most sacred relations with Jesus Christ.

Moreover, this was in accordance with Jewish custom. Self-respecting rabbis made no charge to their pupils. Later, in the Alexandrian School, Clement and Origen would not have any fees for attendance at their lectures. To make a charge was looked upon as a sign of the charlatanry of a sophist. And yet, of course, the teacher was provided for—he trusted himself to freewill offerings. And here we see Jesus dependent on the same source of income.

But now the point of interest before us is that this support all came from women. We might have supposed a rich disciple, such as Joseph of Arimathea, would not have reserved his generosity for costly oblations at the tomb of the Lord whom He secretly believed in. Zacchæus was probably a wealthy publican; but he only met Jesus a week or so before the end of His life on earth. Besides, he may have shrunk from offering Him any of his doubtfully acquired riches. At all events, the fact remains that we have no recorded instance of any gift being made to our Lord and His disciples by a man. The travelling community appears to have been wholly dependent on the gifts of women.

It is not easy to explain this fact. Was it that the claims of Christ were recognised by women more thoroughly than by men? That is scarcely a position which can be maintained with any security. The twelve whom Jesus appointed to carry on His work after His own ministry on earth was over were all men. We never find women taking a leading part in the affairs of the apostolic church as must have been the case if the claims of Christ had been chiefly admitted by women, if in fact primitive Christianity had been primarily a woman's movement. We cannot imagine any rivalry between the devotion of John and Mary of Bethany, of Peter and Mary Magdalene.

We must look in another direction for the explanation of the singular fact that Jesus and His apostles were supported by women. This may be found perhaps in the different social position of the majority of the male disciples from that of, at all events, some of His women disciples. We know that the influence of Jesus was felt for the most part among the humbler sections of society. Most revivals of religion come up from these despised ranks. There were a few, but only a few, of the middle and upper classes in the following of the Carpenter Prophet. But of these few it would seem most were women. That is to say, when the cause of Christ made any way at all in these less familiar regions it was chiefly among the wealthy women.

Now, this is what we know to have been the case with the proselytising progress of Judaism in the pagan aristocracy of Rome. We learn from the satirists that there were ladies of rank in the imperial city who "Sabbatised" in imitation of the Jewish custom. It is possible to regard this as but a passing phase of fashion adopted by people in search of something new. But we must be on our guard against taking the satirists' view of every fact they allude to. It is quite likely that there was an earnest seeking after a religion that should be better than the dead formalism

of the pagan worship on the part of some of these Roman grand dames. In Nero's time even the Empress Poppæa was said to have become a Jewess.

Nearly all the ladies of position at Damascus had gone over to Judaism. If that feeling prevailed among pagan women so as to lead them to what was for them the more spiritual faith of Israel, may we not imagine that a corresponding feeling was found among Jewish women of rank, who knew only too well how little real sap was left in the dry wood of the old tree of their fathers' faith? These women would be ready to turn to some new and more promising teaching. The interesting point, then, that seems to emerge here is not that among the Jews generally women were more ready to accept the claims of Jesus than men, but that in the wealthier circles of the Jews it was the women who were most open to the new gospel.

Then, like the Countess of Huntingdon in the eighteenth century, these ladies used their property for the promotion of the cause that had won their faith and devotion.

When we come to consider the position of these ministering women more in detail, we have the interesting fact that all of them had been suffering from grievous complaints till they had been set free by the wonderful healing grace of Jesus. Even if wealthy in some cases, yet they were all most miserable in the state in which He had first met them. Earthly riches could not buy them health, and could do but little to relieve the misery of their condition. They might well have envied any peasant woman whom they had seen tripping blithely to the well. But now a wonder never hoped for is theirs,—they have been cured! And the consequence is a lifelong devotion to their Deliverer.

The most interesting of these women is Mary Magdalene. She is so interesting that it would not suffice merely to glance at her near the end of a chapter. We must reserve the study of this remarkable person for another occasion,

when she again appears on the page of the gospel story. Next we have Joanna. She was the wife of Herod's steward, a man named Chusa. We have no reason to suppose that her husband was united with her in the new faith. His name is given because of his position; possibly he was well known as one in an important public office.[1]

Now the question rises, How could a person in such a position as this of Joanna's have come under the influence of Jesus? As she is mentioned among the sufferers whom He had cured, we may suppose that it was her dire necessity that drove this court lady to seek help from the peasant Prophet. Her husband's royal master was desirous of the amusement of seeing Jesus perform a miracle; it would have been better than the smartest conjuring trick with which the jugglers entertained the dissolute monarch in the idle hours after dinner. Herod was doomed to be disappointed in his trivial wish. But the thing denied to the king was done for his servant's wife; for hers was a real need. Possibly it was the knowledge of this fact that whetted Herod's curiosity. We can easily understand why Joanna should have sought the assistance of the great Healer. Perhaps like Jeroboam's wife, she consulted this new Prophet in disguise; perhaps like Nicodemus, she came to Him at night. But whether the first approach was open or secret, after being healed Joanna does not attempt to hide her faith. She gives her offerings for the support of Jesus and His disciples. And she goes further. She joins the sort of sisterhood which travels in the company of the disciples.

It seems strange that a married woman should have left her home duties for this service. Perhaps her husband was dead; but it is not said she was a widow. It may be

[1] The Herod named here was Antipas, the man who had some curiosity to see Jesus, and the office of his steward would be that of managing the royal household affairs, and perhaps also the king's estates.

he had cast her out; but of that we have no hint. The whole situation was abnormal. We know too little to understand it fully. Behind all lies the great truth that the claims of Christ are paramount, even above the claims of home.

Of Susanna nothing more is known than that she was one of the ministering sisterhood. We have not even the names of the other women; we can honour the humility that permitted them to be obscure.

CHAPTER IX

The Woman who Touched the Hem of Christ's Garment[1]

THE stolen miracle stamps the character of the woman who snatched it in clear, sharp outline. She who most desired to be hidden has become one of the best known personages of Scripture. The very act that was prompted by her shrinking modesty has set her in the forefront of the gospel story, before the eyes of all the ages. And yet it has done so in a fashion which even this timorous woman could not deprecate. It is not a painful exposure such as she dreaded that we have here, but a delightful revelation, first of faith on her part, then of gentle kindness on the side of her Lord, great spiritual facts which swamp all minor considerations. One who is the happy centre of a triumph of faith and a work of grace cannot but be supremely interesting in these respects. With these higher interests in view let us take up the story of the woman whose cure was so unique in its method and circumstances.

The incident that introduces her comes in as an interlude in the story of the raising of Jairus's daughter. It was while Jesus was on His way to the ruler of the synagogue's house, in Capernaum, that the suffering woman crept up behind Him in the crowd and furtively drew from Him her cure. This is worth noting, because it may supply one factor in the explanation of her unusual mode of seeking help. Jesus was on an errand literally of life and death,

[1] *Matt.* ix. 20–22; *Mark* v. 25–34; *Luke* viii. 43–4.

and the house to which He was going was that of a leading citizen. To attempt to detain Him at such a time would be most inopportune. A shy and shrinking woman would not dare to do such a thing. And yet finding herself near Him in the crowd this woman had her opportunity, if only she could avail herself of it adroitly so as not to make a fuss and hinder the course of the Healer on His way to save the child.

The child and the woman thus brought together by accident into the same narrative also come into comparison through a curious coincidence. Jairus's daughter was twelve years old; this woman had been suffering from her complaint for twelve years. Thus the sufferer had been afflicted during the whole lifetime of the child. How different had been their conditions! Probably Jairus's little daughter had been healthy and happy till seized by the fatal illness that had roused her parents' alarm. Which then is most to be pitied, the young, bright life suddenly snapped off in the opening bud? or the sad, weary life with its many years of suffering still extended? All the concern of the multitude was with the great man's daughter. But we cannot assert that to Jesus the calamity at the ruler's house, with the pomp and publicity given to the mourning for it, was a matter of more compassionate interest than the chronic distress of this obscure woman. At all events we may rest assured that the obscure are as near to the heart of Jesus as people whose station commands the commiseration of a whole city when they are in trouble. Nay, may we not suppose that He has a special sympathy for His hidden disciples just because His is the only sympathy they receive?

The sufferer had much to plead in excuse for making some effort to obtain help from the great Healer, even though the occasion did appear to be most inappropriate; for her need was desperate. This was just a last resource. During those many weary years of her sufferings she had

tried all possible expedients for relief, and they had proved totally ineffectual. She had spent all she had, all her livelihood, in physicians' fees; and yet, though this had reduced her to penury, she was none the better. St. Mark even says she had "suffered much of many physicians," with the result that instead of improving she "rather grew worse;"[1] and we can well believe it when we consider the absurd remedies for her complaint that were recommended by Jewish authorities. St. Luke discreetly omits a statement so discreditable to his profession; but even he is compelled to allow that the patient had derived no benefit from the long and costly course of medical treatment she had undergone. The wonder is that after such an experience of continuous disappointment she did not abandon all hope. At best one would only look for some last council of despair. And yet it is under these most unpromising circumstances that a rare faith manifests itself.

A lower motive, however, must sometimes be allowed in cases such as this. As a drowning man is said to clutch at a straw, an incurable patient is tempted to turn at last to any proposed remedy, however unlikely it may be, and however little authenticated. The vendors of quack medicines trade on this tendency. Those numerous advertisements that appear in almost every newspaper and magazine, and even disfigure the country prospects by the side of the railways, are not without a certain pathetic significance. They could not flourish as they do if they were not supported by an enormous constituency; they bear witness to the existence among us of a vast number of people who, despairing of recognised scientific methods of cure, are ready to fall a prey to the latest pretender to the healer's art. From this point of view it might be argued that the victim of the physician's failure in the narrative before us was not better than one of those unhappy people, abundant enough in our own day, who are always ready to try some

[1] *Mark* v. 26.

new remedy, its very novelty being its one recommendation. But no; she had one saving merit—true faith in Christ.[1]

However vague the ideas in the mind of the woman whose case is now before us may have been—and probably they were not a little confused—she had enough faith to come to Jesus for healing. Clear thinking is not necessary to salvation, nor is it essential for any lesser help that may be had from Christ. But this woman has been accused of worse than imperfect intelligence; she has been blamed for superstition in believing that there was magical efficacy in the mere garment of Christ. If that were all, if there were nothing more in her mind, it must be added that Jesus confirmed her superstition, in permitting the cure and commending her faith. But there is another way of looking at her conduct. She believed that the very least contact with Jesus would suffice for her cure. It was not that the garment in itself was supposed by her to contain a mysterious virtue of healing, like the bones and other relics of saints which are treated as charms by ignorant people in some countries. Her desire was to come near to Christ in the crowd. She was assured that the very least contact would suffice; but it must be contact, more or less immediate. If, therefore, the communication could only be through the fringe of His cloak, since it would still be a certain contact, to her faith that would serve the desired

[1] It would be grossly unjust to a great and honourable profession to use this incident in order to throw contempt on the medical men of our own day because of the wretched failure of their predecessors in bygone ages. There is really no ground of comparison. The modern doctor has little but his name in common with the so-called "physician" of antiquity. As a science, medicine is quite new. Nothing is more striking than the contrast between the contemptuous way in which, till recently, the "leech" was treated in literature and the acknowledged position of the cultured man of science who represents the healing art to-day. Even Dickens seemed to think all doctors were quacks. A man who wrote now on this subject in the style of our great humorist would only be displaying his own ignorance and bad taste. It may be said that as God gave gifts of healing to the first century in the form of miracles, so He has given gifts of healing to the nineteenth century by means of scientific knowledge and the application of it to disease.

end. This is always the one essential of faith—contact with Jesus Christ.

Still it may be said she was superstitious in laying so much stress on the mere act of physical contact. Are we so sure of that? Jesus usually touched to heal, though under exceptional circumstances He only spoke a word, and in some rare cases even cured at a distance. Can we affirm that the actual physical contact with His body, and perhaps through this with His personality, may not have been a Divinely ordered method of healing? The whole subject is so profoundly mysterious that any dogmatic assertions about it are out of place. Certainly the evangelists write as though they held that the healing virtue did flow out through contact.

We are more within the region of normal experience when we endeavour to account for the fact that this suffering woman was satisfied with the minimum of contact. We may set it down in part to her humility. Why should she claim more, if this was enough? Or, as has been already suggested, she may have been careful not to hinder the hurried journey of the Healer to the bedside of the ruler's dying child. Any more formal appeal for help would have occasioned some delay. Possibly in the throng, which, as we learn from St. Peter's remark, was pressing about Jesus on every side,[1] she could not get nearer; though by stooping she could just succeed in reaching the tassel at one of the corners of His cloak as He swept past. The whole narrative, however, suggests a further reason. She desired to remain hidden. She would steal the miracle unobserved. Perhaps, as has been often suggested, knowing that contact with a person in her condition rendered any one ceremonially unclean, she would not venture to ask for the healing touch openly and thus subject the Healer to inconvenience. Besides, it is quite likely that the distressing nature of her complaint would make a

[1] *Luke* viii. 45.

modest woman shrink from observation and dread a public reference to it. Any or all of these reasons may furnish an explanation of her conduct.

And then came the great wonder. She felt in a moment that her distressing complaint was healed. The misery of twelve years' duration had come to an end. It was a sudden cure; it was also a perfect cure; and the joy of it was that she knew this immediately. Theologians have disputed whether a like consciousness accompanies Christ's cure of the soul. Is deliverance from the disease of sin equally a matter of glad assurance springing from interior experience? One would think that if the disease were felt as acutely as a physical ailment is felt this would be the case. And accordingly it is with men like Augustine and Luther and Bunyan who have first experienced the keenest sense of sin that the glad rebound to life and liberty in Christ is most consciously perceived.

The strange part of the story begins at the next stage. When Jesus felt the hand of this poor trembling woman on His cloak He asked who it was that had touched Him. St. Peter, always ready to speak to the occasion, and sometimes not unwilling to correct his Master, expresses his astonishment at hearing such a question. Who had touched Jesus? Any number of people had touched Him; the crowd was pressing round Him. There can be no doubt of what two at least of the evangelists understood to be the experience of Christ at this moment. St. Mark makes the assertion in his own words, how Jesus had perceived that power had gone out of Him;[1] St. Luke gives the statement in the words of Jesus replying to His too officious disciple—"Some one did touch Me: for I perceived that power had gone forth from Me"[2]—this part of the incident is not referred to in *Matthew*. The plain meaning of these expressions is that the power had flowed out involuntarily. We may think this very improbable.

[1] *Mark* v. 30. [2] *Luke* viii. 46.

If so we must admit that the evangelists had misapprehended the facts. But it cannot be reasonably denied that the statement they both give—the one in his own words, the other as coming from Jesus—implies as much. It is commonly asserted that Jesus, on feeling the touch of the poor, suffering woman, and knowing in His Divine consciousness that this was an appeal for help, at once responded, healing her of His own will and by a conscious exertion of energy. This brings the miracle into line with other and more normal cases of healing in our Lord's ministry; and it removes the notion of something like magic—a cure by means of occult powers apart from spiritual means. There is some probability that this is the right explanation of what occurred. It is most reasonable to conclude that the exercise of will which we see in the miracles of Christ generally and the conscious appeal to the Spirit of God as the power by which the great deeds were done would be essential to the working of every miracle; so that we must entirely separate these wonders from everything approaching the nature of magic.

On the other hand, it is only fair to give some weight to the view taken of this occurrence by the two evangelists. Are we quite sure that they were mistaken? Again we must caution ourselves against any dogmatism in regard to the mysterious realm of the miraculous, a realm that is so remote from our everyday experience. Dare we say as a certainty that there may not have been a directly healing virtue in the person of Jesus, which might under rare circumstances have flowed out apart from His own deliberate intention? It seems superstitious to imagine the existence of anything of the kind; but superstition is often only a name for belief in what transcends our normal experience. Perhaps it would be wisest for us to allow at least the possibility of some such explanation of this perfectly unique occurrence.

The way in which Jesus acted on perceiving the woman's touch and the consequent cure gives rise to further questions. He asked who had touched Him, and looked round about to discover the person. This simple statement, like that which precedes, has been the occasion of considerable verbal quibbling. The language of the evangelists, especially that of St. Mark, plainly suggests that Jesus did not know who had thus crept up behind Him and stolen a miracle. In the second gospel we read that Jesus "turned Him about in the crowd and said, Who touched My garments?"[1]; and, again, a little later, "And He looked round about to see her that had done this thing."[2] It has been said that this was only done to make the woman reveal herself and confess her cure before the people, Jesus all the while knowing who and where she was. That is not the plain suggestion of the text. Why should we resort to an ingenious device to make out an explanation? The chief reason for doing so has been an unwillingness to admit that there could be any small detail of events of which Jesus was not aware even during the time of His earthly life with its human limitations. This is contrary to what we see in other instances; on other occasions He asked for information. The reasonable supposition is that when He did so it was because He wanted it—that, for example, if He asked where Lazarus was laid it was because He was seeking information as to the place of the tomb; or if He inquired of the father of a lunatic boy, "How long time is it since this hath come unto him?" it was to learn what He did not know about the child. The denial of any reality in such questions which we meet with in the teaching of Cyril of Alexandria and those modern writers who adopt his views tends to the denial of any reality in the human nature of Christ; it converts the honest gospel records into fallacious documents dealing with appearances that disguise the true facts.

[1] *Mark* v. 30. [2] *Ibid.* v. 32.

In the present instance there are elements that render the unreal treatment of Christ's question and of His inquiring attitude exceptionally difficult to accept. In any view of the case it looks very hard for the poor woman to be forced into publicity. Her trouble was of so peculiarly painful a character that she would naturally shrink from notice; and everybody with right feeling would respect the instinctive reserve of a woman in this condition. Now if Jesus spoke quite simply and naturally when He asked who had touched Him there would have been no unkindness in His making the inquiry, because He would not have known the peculiar reason for the sufferer's manner of seeking her cure. But if He had known who she was and all about her from the first, and only looked round and spoke as He did to compel her to declare herself, it is difficult to discover here the presence of that tender considerateness which always characterised His actions. Thus in the attempt to preserve the omniscience of Christ the theologian who tampers with the natural meaning of the narrative casts a shadow on His goodness. And it is a curious fact, often observable in the school of Cyril and with others who deny any limitation to our Lord's powers and faculties as a man on earth, that these people are much more anxious about His physical powers and intellectual faculties than they are about His moral character. In contending for the absolute and perfect manifestation of the former they continually raise the most serious difficulties with regard to the latter. And yet it is the character of our Lord for which we should be most jealous. Anything that seems for one moment to cast the slightest reflection on that must be resented by His devout followers as a libel and an outrage. Why then labour so earnestly to prove His omniscience in regard to the merest trifles of earthly life when in so many cases this tends to make His conduct appear in an ambiguous light? All difficulty vanishes immediately we are prepared to admit quite

frankly the plain sense of the narrative as that appears in the gospels. Jesus had not the slightest intention of wounding the modesty of a shrinking, timorous woman. In the most natural way, being conscious of the appeal for help, and perceiving that the healing grace had been given, He wished to see and know the person who had obtained this benefit from Him. That was all.

When she heard the question the woman could not keep her secret. It occurred to her that she might have been doing something terribly wrong in obtaining her great blessing from the Healer in this strange way she had invented for herself. The very success of her experiment must have impressed her with the magnitude of her daring. Therefore at the inquiry of Jesus she at once responds, trembling with fear, and casts herself at her Saviour's feet. There, with her face buried in the dust, she tells Him the whole story. It would be enough if she only spoke of her cure. But a new feeling has come into her heart. Till now she had been only thinking of herself, the wretched condition she was in, the doleful failure of all attempts at a remedy, the desperation of her need as she made this one new venture of faith. And when she felt herself cured she still remained self-contained, now in ecstasy at the happy change that had come over her. In this mood of immense relief and extreme delight she was ready to creep away and enjoy the great boon by herself without uttering a word of acknowledgment to the Healer from whom she had derived so great a benefit. We must not entirely blame her if this was her mental condition. Long continued, hopeless suffering tends to make the victim of it self-contained, if not somewhat selfish. It is perfectly true that the school of pain is a discipline of sympathy, that one of the greatest advantages of suffering is that it teaches the sufferer to sympathise with others in a like condition. But this works for the most part as an after result, coming in when there is time for reflection in the calm days that follow deliver-

ance. A great trouble while it lasts necessarily quickens the personal consciousness. It is difficult not to think much about oneself while enduring pain, because nothing is so celf-centred as pain. And then a sudden relief is for the moment equally self-centred, involving a new, intense, personal consciousness.

Nevertheless, while this is natural, it is not desirable. Happily the woman who has just received so delightful a proof of the healing grace of Christ is quick to see the mistake of keeping the fact a secret. Immediately her thoughts turn to the source of her newly recovered health she rises superior to all personal considerations, her own condition before the staring crowd forgotten in the overwhelming presence of her Saviour.

Many people have found it difficult to make a public confession of Christ, and have even excused themselves on the plea of modesty and natural reticence. It is possible to make a mistake as to what is required in this duty of confession. We are not required to publish our inmost thoughts to the world, to "hang our hearts on our sleeves for daws to peck at." There is a right and proper modesty in religion. There are sacred confidences between the soul and its Saviour that are meant for no third person. We may rub the bloom off the tender growth of early piety in rudely forcing it into public observation. That there is a danger of something of the kind happening under novel forms of religious worship now being cultivated among young people is a matter of serious concern to thoughtful observers. Now it is to be noticed that the poor woman whom Jesus had called out from the crowd made her confession direct to our Lord Himself. She did not stand up and make a speech to the crowd. Possibly her trembling words were uttered in faint and whispering tones. It is only to Jesus Christ that we are to be expected to make the full confession of the life's secrets.

But there is another branch of the duty of Christian

confession. The act of the healed woman was visible to all, and the little scene when she came up and cast herself at the feet of Jesus must have attracted general observation. That was only right; she would have been wrong in trying to escape it. Though we are not called on to make a public exposure of our inner experience, we are required to make a public confession of the fact that Christ has graciously heard our appeal and come to our relief. That is to say, though not under any obligation to confess our emotional experiences, we are called upon to confess Christ. Now there is nothing that so much hinders this simple confession as self-consciousness. So long as a person turns his thoughts in upon himself, or only looks away to note what other people are thinking of him, he may be a prey to nervous tremors, his tongue refusing to utter a word, his whole nature revolting against the idea of speaking of his own relations to Christ. But just in proportion as the thought of his Saviour's goodness is uppermost in his mind the self-conscious shyness will be forgotten, and the duty of a direct acknowledgment of his Saviour will become a glad necessity.

In response to the trembling woman's confession Jesus gave her a reassuring word, addressing her by a title we do not meet with on His lips at any other time. He called her "Daughter." There was great tact and delicacy of feeling in the choice of this word under the peculiar circumstances of the case. It would go a long way to soothe the distressed modesty of the poor woman. She must have been almost as old as Jesus, very likely she was older. Yet for the moment He assumed a fatherly attitude towards her—the best of all attitudes with which to comfort her. If He discovered that He had unwittingly hurt her feelings in seeking her out, He made ample amends by this most considerate way of treating her as soon as she had made herself known to Him. A finer instance of that perfect sympathy which sees a situation at a glance, and enters

into it perfectly, cannot be imagined. The simplicity of the expedient would mark it as an act of genius, and we might venture to speak of the inspired genius of sympathy, if it were not that the moral character of the incident lifted it to a higher plane.

Lastly, Jesus commends the faith of the woman whom He addresses so graciously. He recognises that she has true faith. She must not forget that it was her faith and not the touch by itself that had led to the cure. With this recognition He dismisses her in the conventional language of an oriental farewell, but with more than its conventional meaning. May all be well with her indeed and her cure complete!

Tradition has been busy adding to the fame of this woman who so much desired to remain in obscurity. We meet with her as Bernice in apocryphal works such as *Acts of Pilate* and the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, where she appears as a witness for Christ at His trial. She is the St. Veronica of church legend. Eusebius cites a local tradition from *Banias* (Cæsarea Philippi) which claimed her as a native of that city. He says her house was shown in his own day. Near the gates, on a stone pedestal, was the bronze image of a woman kneeling, with her hands stretched out before her like one entreating, while opposite to this was a second statue in bronze, representing a man standing erect, clad in a mantle, and stretching out his hand to the woman. At his feet was a certain strange plant rising as high as the hem of the brazen garment, which represented an antidote for all diseases. This statue, Eusebius tells us, was locally taken to be intended for Christ.[1] Sozomen adds that the Emperor Julian removed the statue of Christ, substituting one of himself, which was afterwards destroyed by lightning.[2] But it is now acknowledged that although the statues may have existed as described, there is no authority for

[1] *Eccl. Hist.* vii. 18. [2] *Eccl. Hist.* v. 21.

the legendary Christian associations connected with them. Gibbon adopted a suggestion that the male figure stood either for the Emperor Vespasian, or for the philosopher Apollonius, who had gone about with a great fame of healing by miracle, while the female figure might represent some city or province, or perhaps the Queen Bernice.[1]

Later legends describe St. Veronica as a princess of Edessa. Relying on them, the Roman Catholic writer Baronius treats her as a rich woman of high birth. All these later accretions are absolutely without historical value. We are left with our picture of the woman who touched the hem of Christ's garment as it is drawn by the evangelists—her distress, her happy expedient, her cure by the healing power of Christ. Surely that is enough to teach us its own lessons without the meretricious adornments of legend to add the fictitious and vulgar importance of rank.

[1] *Decline and Fall*, ch. xlix.

CHAPTER X

The Woman who Washed the Feet of Jesus with her Tears—Forgiveness and Love[1]

IN the time of Christ access to a large Eastern house would seem to have been as free as it is in our own day. Through the open doorway into the central courtyard strangers could enter uninvited and unchallenged, at all events on an occasion of hospitality; and the guests, reclining on couches at the table in a sort of raised alcove, would be within reach of anybody who chose to approach them. In this way it would be quite easy for the woman who, as St. Luke tells us, was seeking to do honour to Jesus, to effect her purpose. Mingling with the servants as they came and went in their attendance on the company, she would be able to step up behind His seat almost unnoticed; while our Lord, resting His elbow on the table, according to custom, and leaning lengthways, would be just in the attitude to permit her to bend over His feet, now divested of the sandals only worn for travelling.

It was not to weep at His feet that this woman came. Her purpose was to anoint them. But she could not control her feelings. Oblivious of the publicity of the place, heedless of the unsympathetic surroundings, overwhelmed with a flood of mingled emotions, she burst into tears; then, to the disgust of propriety, she loosed her hair to wipe the sacred feet on which her tears had fallen; and after that she kissed them again and again. It all came from a full heart—it was spontaneous, unpremeditated,

[1] *Luke* vii. 36–50.

irresistible. You cannot analyse a woman's tears. And it was the presence of Christ that opened the long-sealed fountain.

The terrible past still haunts this woman as a dark and dreadful memory, and the nearness of Jesus brings the horror of it into her mind with redoubled intensity. We never discover how far we have fallen till we come into the presence of Christ. Then for the first time we really fulfil the old Greek philosopher's advice and come to know ourselves. Even the pardoned soul must experience a pang of agony at such an appalling revelation. It is true that no one deals so tenderly with the sinner as his Saviour. But that only makes him deal the more hardly with himself. After sin has been forgiven by God and Christ and even by his fellow-men, the last person to forgive it will be the penitent. He always finds it hard to forgive himself. And there is an irreparable past, although there may be no unpardonable past. The restored soul is not just the same as the innocent soul. The Paradise regained differs from the Paradise that was lost in this essential point, that ignorance of the forbidden fruit never returns.

All this would make redemption itself a disappointing boon if there were not another side to the case. But there is another side. The penitent can only weep tears of sorrow, and very bitter tears they are. But this woman is more than a penitent; she has met a Saviour, and there has come to her a gospel that has transformed the whole outlook of her life, banishing despair, and lighting up the horizon with a new, undreamed-of hope. And now it is the joy of this glad discovery in a heart that had been seared and crushed and where no true happiness had been known for many a day that brings her to the feet of Jesus. She is there not to lament the past, but to give expression to her gratitude for a new life. She weeps; but it is His goodness rather than her own shame that starts her tears.

The significance of this behaviour was quite unintel-

ligible to the strict religious man at whose house such an unusual scene was witnessed; and so was the way in which Jesus received it. Do not let us be unjust to him. The Pharisee does not offend against the first principles of hospitality so far as to say or do anything overtly antagonistic to Christ. We have no repetition here of the charge that Jesus is the Friend of publicans and sinners. The host is politely silent. He only *thinks*, and his thought is a natural one under the circumstances. Jesus is accepting the effusive homage of this woman. Then the Man of Nazareth cannot be a prophet! If He were He would know what sort of a person it was who had the impertinence to be actually holding[1] His feet. Thus the Pharisee argued with himself, and from his own standpoint very naturally. Apparently he had asked Jesus to his house in some curiosity, with a real desire to know a man who was so much talked about. That rare phenomenon, a Pharisee with an open mind, he would exercise his own judgment and draw his own conclusions. But this one incident is quite enough to determine what they must be. Possibly he was a little disappointed, for with some courage, at a risk of being charged with latitudinarianism, he had patronised the rustic prophet. A prophet indeed! and he cannot read the character of this notoriously abandoned person!

We may grant that this hasty verdict was inevitable. And yet, oh, the blindness of it! In His reply to Simon's unuttered comment Jesus showed that He was not unaware of the character borne by the weeping woman; He also showed that He could read His host's secret thoughts. This was a double refutation of the man's hasty superficial judgment, a twofold evidence of the possession of prophetic gifts.

But there was much more in Christ's insight. As

[1] The word in the Greek means more than *touching*, and it indicates a continuous grasp.

regards the woman He did not merely perceive as by a sort of second-sight a character that was only too well known to her neighbours. He saw something else in her and in the whole situation which was quite new, and to a recognition of which neither His host, nor the strict set to which the man belonged, nor the people generally, had at all approached. The rude assumption of the Pharisee was erroneous. If Jesus were a prophet He would know that this woman was a sinner. Would He? What would Simon say to the totally unexpected position that for the very reason that He was a prophet and more than a prophet He could declare that to be a false judgment? Since she had passed through a new birth into a new life, it was not only ungracious, it was distinctly unjust to cast up any old charges against her. From these charges she had been freed by the grace of forgiveness.

Even if the woman at His feet had been still one of the multitude of lost sheep whom He had come to seek and to save He would not have shared the Pharisee's treatment of her. He knew full well the abominable hypocrisy of it; He knew how often men whose private lives were far more vile than the lives of the miserable victims of their ostentatious zeal for purity were foremost in the condemnation of the outcasts. And then in His treatment of the fallen His one object was to restore them. He said expressly that He had not come to condemn; He had come to save. Condemning other people for their sins was the pet diversion of the professors of piety in His day. The occupation has not been unknown in subsequent ages. It was wholly averse to the mind of Christ; and yet none could have loathed all sin with a deeper horror than the holy Jesus.

In the present case, however, we are not watching Christ's treatment of a sinner. The peculiar interest of the narrative comes from the fact that we meet the character in question at a later period of her career. And the point at issue is that while Jesus knows this and acts

accordingly His host has no glimmer of perception of it. The fact is brought out distinctly by the use of the Greek perfect. Jesus does not pronounce absolution on the penitent, there and then declaring her to be free from the guilt of her past, in an immediate act of forgiveness. He states that her sin *has* been forgiven. Then the right course is to recognise the fact frankly. The way of the Pharisee is the way of the world. It is to disbelieve in forgiveness, or at least to disbelieve in its fruits. The Pharisee is as cynical as the man of the world, and inevitably so, seeing that his religion is no better than canonised worldliness—an external, superficial conventionality. So long as this is the position assumed it will be impossible to understand either the action of the woman who stood at the feet of Jesus or the view He took of it.

But now, enlightened by His revelation of the truth, we are able to see both the meaning of her conduct and the way in which Christ received it.

In the first place, there is no reason to minimise the evil of the past. Since Simon is coarse-minded enough to call attention to them, the shame and sorrow of the facts are not to be denied. This weeping woman had been a sinner, and her sins were many. So much is to be admitted, to the satisfaction of the censor. That terrible word "many," covering as it does an awful tale of depravity, points to a long course of vice. This is not an instance of one unhappy lapse from virtue attaching an undying stigma to the character for life. And yet how often is it the case that the sin which began with the weakness of trusting a traitor has been visited by such harsh condemnation from a world of Pharisees as to induce the recklessness of despair, and then that has led on to a subsequent career of ever-deepening guilt. A heavy charge must be brought home to the man who took the first step in driving a young soul down the road to perdition. Still it is the road to perdition.

We must not let a righteous indignation against the monstrous social iniquity that spares the tempter and tramples his victim in the mire blind us to the truth that her dreadful course is also one of real guilt. The greater blame lies at the door of the tempter—that is still to be insisted on. So many cruel forces combine to impel the woman who has made one slip down the headlong way to ruin that we must regard the result with profound compassion. But this is not all. It *is* ruin, the most unspeakably awful ruin of a soul. That is the tragedy of it. A woman is lowered in moral and spiritual nature, almost below recognition as belonging to the ranks of womanhood at all, when she has come to make a trade of vice. And then in turn she becomes the temptress; and ignorant youth has to be warned that the entrance to her house is the gate of death. Nothing that Jesus has taught in opposition to the harsh, cruel judgment of the Pharisee at all affects the stern admonitions of the Book of Proverbs on this subject. Can it be said that the abandoned person who lays her traps and resorts to cunning enticements to catch her prey is other than a sinner? And this one sin does not stand alone, like a single blot on a white sheet of paper. No sin is solitary. Sins ever go in troops, great sins accompanied by a train of attendant minor faults, or small sins opening the door to wickedness of Satanic magnitude. The course of vice is marked by falsehood, dishonesty, cruelty—a black host beyond reckoning. This is not a subject on which to expatiate in the story of a wretched woman, because she is so wretched, first foully wronged by another and then plunged into hopeless misery. Still, since a foolish, superficial, sentimental treatment of the matter has sprung up in our day—it needs to be said for the vindication of womanly purity, the most precious preservative of social well-being, that the loss of it is *sin*—the word must be written without reservation—and the source of a multitude of sins.

But having said this in order that there may be no mistake as to the right estimate of the facts of the past we may hasten away to other regions, and we must do so if we would follow our Lord in His treatment of repented and pardoned sin. The sins which are many are all forgiven. There is no rebate, no reservation, no casting up of the past against the offender in any way whatever. A half-hearted faith in forgiveness will not go so far as that. The worldly, pharisaic habit is to be perpetually harping on the old charge of guilt. The wound is not allowed to heal. It must be repeatedly abrased. Even if in some confused way it is perceived that the sin is forgiven, still the person to whom it belonged is reckoned to have lost caste for life, as if there could be any such thing as the forgiveness of sin without the forgiveness of the sinner, or as if there could be any real forgiveness of the sinner without full restoration. The difficulty is to believe in the great Pauline idea of justification—Pauline, that is to say, in the full exposition of it, though it is in truth an idea that the apostle had derived from his Master, just the expansion of Christ's teaching about full and complete forgiveness. In the parable of the Pharisee and the publican the latter goes down to his house "justified." The forgiveness puts the man in the place of a righteous man; from thenceforth he is regarded as righteous and receives from God the mead of righteousness. Then no slur remains on the character of a person who has been truly forgiven. It was a most daring act on the part of Jesus to receive such homage as was here given to Him by a woman of ill repute, and that in a Pharisee's house, of all places. Perhaps this was the most courageous position He ever took up. Many a man who would not like to be regarded as a moral coward would have shrunk from it, deeming it very inexpedient and liable to shocking misunderstandings. As usual Jesus now acts as with sublime indifference to convention, with a perfectly daring independence. Here is the Divine ideal of chivalry; for

what a noble defence He has for the friendless woman! He does not shock the spectators' prejudices in sheer recklessness. He has a deliberate purpose in shocking them. They are unjust and untrue. By His action He is setting the model for a higher principle of judgment than they have dreamed of—the grand, inspiring principle, that when the past has been forgiven it must not be brought up as any disadvantage to the person who has received this perfect gift of the grace of God.

Further, while Christ's teaching about the reality of forgiveness explains His own position and the view He takes of the homage offered to Him, at the same time it explains the fervour of the woman's devotion. In itself her action was not so startling as a similar thing would be among us. It would be impossible according to Western manners, but it was quite usual among the Jews for an admiring pupil to kiss the feet of a great teacher. A caricature of the old Eastern custom is preserved in the Roman Catholic rite of kissing the pope's foot. What has now become ridiculous in the eyes of Protestants was gravely allowed by Orientals of Christ's time as a fitting sign of reverence. Therefore it was not the woman's act, which to us seems so strange, that offended Simon, but only the well-known character of the person who performed it, and this was all that the Pharisee complained of.

What, however, is remarkable in the present case is the passion which converted a beautiful kind of homage into a perfect outpouring of heart and soul. This is no formal sign of devotion; nor is it like the dignified, graceful act of the lady of Bethany who anointed the head of her Guest with costly spikenard, filling her house with the luxurious fragrance—a deed of affection and true devotion, but calm and self-possessed. A greater contrast cannot be imagined than that between Mary's stately service and the outcast woman's enthusiastic outburst of emotion.

And yet when we consider the case in its essential features,

the wonder is not that such an incident appears once for all in the story of Jesus, but that it is a solitary one. The motive being the joy and gratitude of forgiveness, the strange thing is that this is not more frequently seen in some outward demonstration, since the gift of forgiveness is so freely bestowed. But it would seem, while the decency of thanksgiving may be commonly observed, real gratitude as an emotion at all commensurate with the unspeakably great boon of forgiveness is exceedingly rare.

The indifferent behaviour of our Lord's host serves well as a background on which the penitent's love and adoration are shown in their power and beauty. Simon had made but a shabby host. He had neglected the common customs of hospitality, either from cool indifference or in sheer insolence. If the latter was his motive his offence was gross and odious. He had been under no obligation to invite the peasant Prophet to his house. But when he put himself out of the way to do so of his own free choice he was bound to behave with decent friendliness and take some pains to see to his Guest's comfort. His manners show that he treated Jesus as quite an inferior kind of guest. Even with that idea in his mind his rudeness was unpardonable, for then he should have been all the more solicitous. He had given no kiss of welcome; had provided no water for the washing of his Guest's tired and travel-worn feet; had not followed custom in having a simple fragrant oil poured on His hair. Did Simon think Jesus would not notice these little details? If so, he must have been startled and not a little ashamed at the discovery that this quiet simple man had observed everything. Jesus is not oblivious of small negligences, not, of course, because He thirsts for attention—did He not once say that "the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister"?—but simply because they are signs of something deeper, proofs of an utter lack of real interest in Him. How different is this woman, washing His feet with her very tears, wiping

them with the hairs of her head, kissing them, and anointing them, not with oil, but with the more precious ointment?

But more important than the mere contrast of action is the revelation of character and motive that is thus brought out. That is the key to the whole position. The parable of the two debtors makes this quite clear. It is reasonable to suppose that the one who was forgiven most will love most. Was the woman's sin great? And is it now all forgiven? Then this forgiveness is equally great; and the love that springs from it will be also great. Some confusion has come in here through a very common misunderstanding of our Lord's language. Jesus says, "Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little."[1] This is commonly read, in accordance with what may be regarded as its obvious meaning, so as to teach that the penitent was forgiven on account of her love, the greatness of her pardon arising from the greatness of her love. But there are several reasons for holding that this cannot be our Lord's meaning.

In the first place He is accounting for and explaining the woman's effusiveness of emotion. But the sentence thus rendered supplies no explanation of it, and carries our thoughts off to another point.

Then it is out of harmony with the concluding clause which distinctly sets forth the smallness of forgiveness as the reason for the smallness of love—the reverse relation of the two things. If the common view were correct the final clause should run, "For to him who loveth little, little will be forgiven." The close similarity in form compels us to give a balanced contrast of meaning to these two clauses as in a case of Hebrew parallelism. Besides, the reminder of Simon's action points in the direction suggested by the final clause. It was because the Pharisee had no

[1] *Luke* vii. 47.

strong sense of the fact of being forgiven by Christ that he had no warmth of devotion to Christ.

Lastly, in dismissing the woman Jesus says, "Thy faith hath saved thee,"—"thy faith," not "thy love." No doubt the two work together, but it is important to keep the ideas distinct. To expect love to Christ before the experience of forgiveness is to expect an impossibility. The motive for love is not there. A great mistake is made when young people are approached with the question as to whether they love Christ, in a way implying that this is the first step to the Christian life. When Jesus saw the fisherman by the lake at the beginning of His intercourse with him He did not ask the question, "Simon, son of John, lovest thou Me?" That question came at the very last. His first word was simply, "Follow Me." We do not begin with love; we grow to love. The first step is faith. This is orthodox Protestant theology; it is also truth experienced in life; and it is what the incident before us would suggest. But then we do not find it quite easy to understand our Lord's language in the first part of the utterance just quoted. The only interpretation that is agreeable to the drift of His teaching throughout must be that which understands Him to be giving, not the reason for the forgiveness of the penitent, but the reason for His own statement that her sin had been forgiven. It is because she loves much that Jesus makes the assertion that her sins are forgiven. In other words, the woman's love is the sign of her forgiveness, since it is its fruit.

Thus we are brought round again to the main idea, the great truth that crowns the whole incident with light and hope—love the fruit of forgiveness. Where there is a deep sense of forgiveness there will be a great awakening of love. This is the secret of love to Christ revealed not only in the incident of the woman at Simon's feast, but in many another story of redeemed souls. It is seen in St. Paul's enthusiasm for the Christ who had set him free

from the double bondage of the flesh and the law—in the passion of Augustine's *Confessions* that throb and palpitate with a fervour not all to be accounted for by the heat of an African temperament—in the beauty of Dante's Paradise, that rapture of the heavenly Rose, only attained after witnessing the awful sights of the Inferno and the piteous scenes of the Purgatory—in Luther's glad devotion to Christ following his immense sense of relief at the discovery of the perfectly free forgiveness of God's justification by faith—in the story of Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*, that story which tells of a soul passing through agonies of guilt and shame to come at last to rejoice in the exceeding goodness of Christ its Saviour.

It is always so. Light estimates of sin leave us with cold feelings towards Christ. But where the deepest horror of guilt has been first awakened and then the great wonder of forgiveness has followed, the natural result is the outburst of a passionate love to the Redeemer whose grace has wrought the transformation of Gehenna into Paradise.

Thus this woman's action, at which Simon the Pharisee affected to be so scandalised, is explained and justified. For we may go yet one step further. Real love must express itself. At all events that is but a poor and feeble affection which can live on without making some sign of its existence. Oriental methods must be left for the East. But some method even the phlegmatic Saxon must and will have for bringing out his love and devotion to Christ if any such passion is glowing in his breast. Our Lord's final words show that an expression of love is not unwelcome to Him, even though it take a form at which those who do not understand what it implies are shocked. There is danger lest devotion should be smothered by propriety. We have come to erect into the first place of honour in the Church the very worthy but still secondary apostolic precept, "Let all things be done decently and in order."

Too often this is interpreted as meaning little more than decent burial, the burial of passion and enthusiasm. Thus the typical air of devotion tends to approach the correct manners of an undertaker. We have lost the freedom of emotion. The danger is that we should lose the emotion itself.

Finally, this woman whom Jesus had understood so well and justified so graciously, is sent home with a message of peace. As she departs, once again she is assured that her sins are forgiven. It is the great fact in her life, never to be forgotten, also never to be doubted. We meet with no other case in the gospel story in which Jesus gives this assurance so repeatedly or so emphatically. Comforting words of farewell are much needed, because in our hard world the penitent has a cruel time of it. God's forgiveness is given, but not her fellow-sinner's. The most difficult task for this woman will be to win any faith from womankind. She will have to stand quite alone in a chill atmosphere of social contempt. Still she is forgiven. That is her pearl of great price, and as she dries her tears and goes out from the Pharisee's house, it is with God's bow of hope in her sky. Dark as may be the world around her, her heart can be radiant with the joy of her Lord.

CHAPTER XI

The Canaanite Woman—A Mother's Persistence.[1]

THE incident of the Canaanite woman stands by itself without parallel in the gospel story. The time, the place, the nationality of the woman, her conduct, and the treatment she receives, are all unique. Jesus was now an exile from the familiar scenes of His labour among His fellow-countrymen of Galilee, opposed by the leading authorities, rejected by the great body of the people, deserted by the bulk of His old followers, with only a dwindling remnant still attached to Him, the tide of popularity having entirely ebbed away. It was positively dangerous for Him to be discovered on Jewish territory. He had no fear for Himself, and the time was not far distant when He was to set His face steadfastly to go up to Jerusalem, knowing that it was to meet His death there; but the training of the men who were to carry on His work was not yet complete, and therefore His "time" was "not yet come." Accordingly He was now in retirement with these faithful few at the remote north-west corner of Palestine, or perhaps actually over the border and in heathen territory. We may so read the account in *Mark* as to understand that He walked through the streets of the ancient city of Tyre, where He found a house in which to rest, hoping that He might remain there unknown. But that was not possible, for the fame of the great Healer had penetrated even to this distant city.

Thus it came about that a native of these parts hearing

[1] *Matt.* xv. 21–28; *Mark* vii. 24–30.

of His presence in her neighbourhood daringly seized her opportunity, heathen as she was, and came to Him—St. Mark says, into the very house—beseeching His help for her afflicted daughter. In *Matthew* she is described as "a Canaanite woman;" in *Mark* as "a Greek, a Syro-Phœnician by race." "Phœnician" is just the Greek equivalent for "Canaanite." The old Phœnicia of Tyre and Sidon being now a part of the large Roman province of Syria, it came to be called "Syro-Phœnicia" to distinguish it from the Phœnicia of North Africa, Carthage and its neighbourhood—the *Punicus* of the Romans, which is but a Latinising of the same name. The woman was therefore strictly speaking not a Greek at all. She is simply called a Greek in a general sense, as one who was not a Jew, and who belonged to the outlying district which had all been comprehended in the Macedonian Empire, and into which the Greek language and civilisation had been introduced. The careful exactness with which St. Mark describes the racial relations of this woman shows us how much importance he attaches to them. He makes it clear beyond all possibility of dispute that she is no Jewess. She is not only a Gentile; she is of the stock of Canaan—the people whom the Israelites had set themselves to exterminate like vermin—of the race of the Baal-worshippers in the days of the kings. This is to prepare us for the singular reception she receives from Jesus. That it does not quite prepare us for it, however, must be fairly admitted. The story is one of some perplexity even after every conceivable explanation has been given.

A mother's undying love is the motive that sends the Canaanite woman on her daring quest. It is this that summons up her strength for the attempt, sustains her obstinate persistency in spite of discouraging rebuffs, and inspires her at the critical moment with a most delightful *repartee*, as humble as it is clever. She is the mother fighting for her child, and in her motherhood it appears

that all racial and even all religious differences must be lost sight of. Here we are at one of the great primitive passions of human nature. The mother is at heart the same, whether she be the Jewish Rizpah guarding her seven sons' corpses from the vultures, or the Greek Niobe weeping for her murdered children, Hagar, the outcast slave in the desert, despairing for her son's life, or Jeroboam's queen secretly seeking counsel and help from the prophet of Jehovah in her desperate need while the young heir to the throne of Israel lies dying in the palace at Tirzah. History and legend give us *replicas* without number of a mother's devotion, heroism, self-sacrifice. It is always the same story in spirit and character, though with every possible variety of incident, the nearest to the Divine of all earthly events.

Prompted by the indomitable urgency of a mother's heart the Canaanite woman enters the presence of the Jew stranger, and casting herself at His feet cries, "Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David, for my daughter is terribly afflicted with a demon possession." It is her daughter that she is pleading for, and yet in the first place she unwittingly begs for compassion on herself; for the child's affliction is the mother's agony, and it is her own distress that is visible to Christ as she lies prostrate before Him. But the strangest thing about her words is that she addresses Jesus as the Jewish Messiah. He is the "Son of David." We know that the Messianic idea had spread in a vague way far over the East; it must have been known in Tyre. But this woman has actually come to the faith in Jesus as the fulfilment of that idea, a faith that has not yet found expression even among our Lord's intimate companions, for the time is earlier than St. Peter's great confession. It is clear that the belief was in the air as a sort of surmise. Some accepted it, others had different explanations to offer for the amazing career of the Prophet of Nazareth. But this heathen woman catches at the great title that she has

somehow heard attached to the name of Jesus and unhesitatingly offers it Him. His treatment of her shows that He recognised more in it than the language of empty flattery or the parrot-like repetition of a casual appellation. She had some sort of notion of what the phrase meant, and her use of it was one sign of true faith. She had heard enough of Jesus by repute to begin to have faith in Him. And yet how little there had been as yet on which to feed her faith! At first this was spurred on by the mother's love, a love that prompted her to make a very daring venture of faith on what could be but yet very slender grounds of knowledge.

Hitherto the cry for help has never come to the ears of Jesus in vain. Now for the first time in His life He turns a deaf ear to the piteous appeal. This surprises us. We should never have imagined anything of the kind. The very improbability of the narrative, standing as it does entirely by itself, speaks for its veracity. Nobody would have invented such a story as this; nobody *could* have invented it. Yet how are we to account for it? In the first place, notice that hard as the conduct of Jesus might seem to us if we were not well assured that there must be some way of explaining it in consistency with the invariable kindness of His heart, to His disciples it seemed even too easy and lenient. For they took upon them to suggest that He should send the importunate woman away. Then He was not giving any indication that her presence was annoying to Him. A strict Jew would have resented the intrusion of a heathen woman. It would not have been at all remarkable in the eyes of His nation if Jesus had scornfully repulsed this Canaanite mother for daring to seek His aid. Jesus was doing nothing of the kind, and His patient silence called from the disciples some remonstrance. It can scarcely be doubted that the woman availed herself of it as an encouragement to press her plea for pity all the more urgently. At least she has an opportunity for

obtaining a full hearing, and that is more than she had any right to expect when she set out from her home with the deliberate intention of violating a very strict social convention.

Nevertheless all this does not satisfy us. To people who know the character of Jesus Christ, Jewish conventions count for nothing in explaining His actions. Why then did He hesitate in the present case? He gives us His own answer. There is no excuse for not accepting it or for making any attempt to explain it out of its natural meaning. He was only sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. His earthly mission was solely to the Jews. All His ministry had been carried on within the confines of the land of Israel. With His boundless human sympathies this limitation must have been a positive pain to Him. The Son of Man, would He not have entered with joy into the prosecution of a world-wide mission such as that to which His servant Paul was afterwards called? But He knew it was His Father's will that He should labour in the more limited sphere, among the people who were most prejudiced against His choicest teaching, and yet where after all He could best find and train the men who were to build on the foundation He was laying. It was in the eternal counsels of God that the salvation of the world should spring from Israel, and that not arbitrarily, but because in this way it could be best effected. Had Jesus thrown Himself into a great mission to the heathen world two direct conquences of a most disastrous kind would have followed. First, He would have lost His last foothold among the Jews; and second, His activity would have been dissipated, scattered over a boundless sea. It was necessary that it should be concentrated in order that it might live and work.

Besides, His great mission was not for miracle-working. That only came in by the way, because while He was conscious of possessing the power His heart was moved with

compassion to exercise it for the benefit of the sufferers who came across His path. Had He gone through the world as a Healer of all who came to Him He would have been known only, or at least chiefly, as a great Thaumaturgist. He could not have been the Saviour of the world if He had not been first the Christ of Israel.

There are few things more galling to a man of energy than the sound of the command "Halt"; but still more trying is it to one of endless compassion to hear that unwelcome word when he sees before him opening opportunities of gracious helpfulness. How difficult it must have been for the British marines from the fleet on guard in Cretan waters to resist the temptation to strike a blow for the relief of the Greeks! But obedience comes even before mercy. We may be sure then that Jesus would have felt keen pain in remaining silent under the piteous appeals of this mother on behalf of her afflicted child. If she was hurt by His apparent coldness, He must have been hurt much more in feeling compelled to give her so unusual a reception.

Nevertheless His subsequent yielding shows that He did not interpret the limitation of His ministry in an absolute way. After all there might be exceptions. The law of God is not a formal rule only to be read in the strictness of the letter. He speaks to the intelligence of His servants, and expects every case to be considered on its own merits. Our Lord's silence may indicate that He was debating this new question in His own mind. Never before had He been placed in such a dilemma—His heart drawing one way, His mission another. Still there might be some exceptional excuse for an exceptional action. Perhaps He was waiting for that to appear. His silence gave the woman an opportunity to further reveal her character. Or shall we say that He was silent for very compunction of heart? He did not yet see His way to yield to her request; yet He could not bring Himself to say

her nay. That was a word He had never yet spoken, never could speak, to any humble trustful applicant for His mercy.

The position is not a little peculiar—the Canaanite woman persistently urging her plea, Jesus receiving it in unbroken silence! At length the disciples interfere to end what seems to them to be an awkward situation. They venture to urge Him to send this importunate heathen person away. As if He could not have done that of His own accord had He so willed! Yet it is to be remarked that unlike the cases of Bartimæus whose unseemly shouts the disciples themselves rebuked, or of the women who brought their children to Jesus for His blessing at an inconvenient moment, breaking into an interesting discussion of casuistry, and were repelled by the disciples with some irritation, in the present instance they did not venture to interfere directly and themselves order the woman to go. Even they must have perceived that it would be a strange thing for Jesus to resist an appeal for help, though this might for once come from a heathen.

His disciples' words of remonstrance call forth a strange speech from Jesus. He seems to be taking refuge in a cruel Jewish proverb. It is not fitting to take the children's bread and fling it to dogs. Various attempts have been made to mitigate the apparent harshness of these words, so amazing as falling from the lips of the gentle and merciful Jesus. Thus it has been pointed out that the Greek term is a diminutive, meaning *little* dogs, and so suggestive of the young dogs that might be treated with more considerateness than the full-grown animals. But on the other hand it has to be observed that in this later provincial Greek it was very usual to employ diminutives for no particular reason. Then it has been said that Jesus did not mean those surly, half-savage brutes that prowl about Eastern cities in search of offal—the scavengers of the streets, making night hideous with their yells, but little pet dogs that the children play with as they run

under their table. But it is extremely doubtful whether any dogs were treated in this way in Syria—though the woman is clever enough to apply the saying to dogs that are privately owned and admitted to the house. Besides, it is not Jesus, but the Canaanite woman who first refers to the dogs under the table. And look at it how we may, the fact remains that Jews were accustomed to call their heathen neighbours by the offensive nickname of "dogs," and for Jesus to employ the word at all in addressing a heathen woman could not but suggest to her the Jews' contempt for her people.

We must look in another direction for the explanation of the seeming contradiction between this strange utterance of Christ's and all that we know of His kind and considerate character. Of one thing we may be sure, even if no satisfactory explanation be forthcoming, Jesus never could be really harsh to any troubled soul. You would sooner find gloom in a sunbeam than unkindness in word or look of Christ. Anger He could show against hypocrisy and cruelty and injustice, an anger that blazed out at times with fierce indignation; but harshness towards a humble, pleading application it was not in Him to exhibit.

We must remember that in the bareness of their narratives the evangelists do not give us any of those nuances that soften the lines of more dainty literature. They have no idea of supplying us with those details which we look for in the model *raconteur*. We might almost compare these gospel narratives to the severe statuary of the more ancient period of Greek art before Phidias had arisen to breathe into it the subtle spirit of human life. They are perfectly honest and truthful, and thus we are safe in their hands from any of that romancing by means of which some historians succeed in giving to their narratives the charm of a novel. This is their great merit. But the price we have to pay for it is the loss of those thousand and one delicate touches that we are accustomed to find in modern

writing. The evangelists say nothing of the tone of the voice, the look of the eye, the manner and expression of the speaker when he gives utterance to the sayings they content themselves with ascribing to him in the simplest possible way. They never tell us when Jesus smiled. But a smile is often more significant than a sentence. There may be a world of meaning in a look. Once, as an exception to this rigorous suppression of detail, we are told that Jesus turned and looked at Peter, and ever after painters have despaired of rendering that look, feeling that it meant volumes to the heart-broken man who received it. We know very well that the very same words may convey totally different impressions according as they are spoken in jest or in earnest, in tones of irony or of serious conviction, with gentle or angry expression, a smile or a frown.

What if Jesus quoted this Jewish proverb in a hesitating tone, citing a well-known saying as though He meant, "You know they say you must not take the children's bread and cast it to dogs. What do you make of that?" Suppose He spoke with a smile on His lips and a kindly light in His eye. In that case the whole meaning of the phrase would be changed. Since concerning all such very important factors of the case we are left entirely in the dark, with nothing but our own conjectures to guide us, is it not only just to allow that some explanation might be forthcoming if only we could cross-examine an observant witness of the scene?

And now this keen-witted woman sees her chance. The very words which to the dull hearer would seem to shut the dungeon door on hope, open to her quick mind the way for a fresh plea. Can we suppose that Jesus had not seen at a glance what sort of a person He was dealing with? These nimble minds reveal their nature at once to a less penetrating gaze than that of One who was always accustomed to read the thoughts of the people with whom He was conversing. Had she been of a more sluggish tem-

perament He might not have addressed her as He did. It is not everybody to whom a remark of pleasant irony can be safely made. Jesus saw that here was a case in which He could use this dangerous style without any risk of being misapprehended; or at all events He discerned the courage and persistency of a woman who would not be put off by a phrase which she had wit enough to turn against the speaker.

So seizing her opportunity the suppliant actually makes the words that seem to be a cruel rebuff the very excuse for pressing her demand. She discovers a little chink in the wall that Jesus has built round His grace, through which she can creep in and obtain her morsel. Even the very dogs may eat of the crumbs that fall from their master's table. What delightful repartee! How apt! How exactly to the point! And how timely! What clever things we could all say if only we had time to hunt them out! Only the happy thought comes too late. That new point of hers is delicious—"their master's table." Thus she quietly suggests a sort of claim, though one confessedly inferior to the children's right. She will not account herself a stranger. The children's father is at least her master, and even she has a place in the family, though the very humblest, only that of a watch-dog. There is fine intelligence in this fresh device of hers. But a child's fate is at stake, and the very most must be made of the opportunity that has come once for all. Happy woman that she has the gift to use it! May we not even call her wit an inspiration mercifully given her for the saving of her child?

It has been said that in this one case Jesus was outwitted in argument by a woman, and that He graciously acknowledged His defeat by yielding to the woman's clever plea. It may be so; but that He could not have kept up the contest of words had He chosen is not to be supposed. Was He ever worsted in argument when He put forth His

strength? Jacob contends with the "Traveller unknown" only so long as his mysterious Antagonist permits; at a touch the Patriarch's sinew shrinks. Jesus had no desire to get the better of this suppliant in her argument. Nobody could have been more delighted at her clever reply than He was. It is not only that the sparkle of intellect is always welcome, but the spirit of the answer means so much.

Nothing is more dangerous than the faculty of smartness in repartee. Too often it wounds when no unkindness is intended; and it is especially difficult when the speaker is addressing a superior. But the remarkable thing about this woman's answer to Christ's seemingly repellant speech is, that while it is adequate for her purpose there is not a grain of impertinence in it; that she contrives to retain her humility even when turning our Lord's words against His own case. There lies the perfection of her wit and the charm of it. She does not attempt to deny the correctness of the harsh Jewish proverb. A woman of duller mind or less delicate feelings would have tried to push her attack on these lines, and then she would have proved herself to be but ordinary. It is by admitting to the full, or at least tacitly acquiescing in, the painful words she has just heard that she is able to erect a new plea on the very ground they furnish her. Thus while her method reveals the fine perfection of her wit, at the same time it shows the true modesty of her spirit. Nothing can be more humble than this plea for the crumbs that the very dogs are not hindered from taking. If only we could see it we should admit that self-assertion is always the greatest possible barrier to the reception of the grace of Christ. The lower we place ourselves before Him the stronger is our plea. Our abject need is our one claim. Before God our sole ground of hope is the mendicant's destitution.

A further charm in this plea for the crumbs is that with all its humility it does not admit of any lessening of the

boon sought after. There is no haggling about it. The suppliant does not say, "If I have asked for too great a thing, give me some smaller favour, more suitable to my position." There is just one thing she wants, and a great thing it is, this healing of her afflicted daughter—to her mother's heart more desirable than any other conceivable favour. This is all she has come to beg; and nothing but this will satisfy her now. Yet she ventures to class it with the crumbs that fall from the children's feast in comparison with the wealth of bounties it is the power of Jesus to bestow. Thus the very expression of her mingled ingenuity and modesty is a sign of her amazing faith. Even this great favour that she is daring to seek will be largely exceeded by what Jesus will be doing for His own people. Immeasurably valuable as it is, she believes that it must be but as a crumb to the royal feast that the Christ is spreading for the children of the kingdom. Here is a delicate ascription of praise, too delicate and at the same time too genuine to be called a compliment. To describe the great boon as but a crumb from Christ's table is to imply that the bounty of that table must be something inconceivably magnificent, and the power and generosity of Him who is providing for it incomparably glorious. It needs to be recognised that the timorous spirit which shrinks from asking great things of Christ is not thereby commending its own humility. A more modest temper would be that of the Queen of Sheba, amazed that the half had not been told her. A greater than Solomon is here, and just in proportion as His greatness is acknowledged, we shall perceive that nothing is too wonderful for Him to perform. There is logic in the familiar refrain—

> "Thou art coming to a king;
> Large petitions with thee bring."

We need not be astonished that Jesus yielded at once to this perfect plea of the suppliant at His feet. He had no

pride to lead Him to resent the appearance of being worsted by a heathen woman, and no unreasonable obstinacy urging Him never to change an attitude He had once taken up. It must have been a rare pleasure in those times of depression amid failing hearts for Him to discover the faith that revealed itself in the Canaanite woman's apt reply. He could deny her nothing now. Had she not proved herself to be in heart a true daughter of Abraham by discovering a double portion of Abraham's faith? Astonished and delighted He exclaims, "O woman, great is thy faith: be it done unto thee even as thou wilt." She is to have just what she sought, her daughter healed from that very hour.

CHAPTER XII

The Mother of Zebedee's Children—Maternal Ambition[1]

THE curious periphrasis with which Zebedee's wife is described in *Matthew* on two occasions[2] without being named, although her name is given in *Mark*[3] and *John*,[4] suggests that her eminent place in the gospel story is assigned to her chiefly on account of her motherhood. It was no small thing to be the mother of two apostles, and these of the inner group, both members of the trio of Christ's most intimate friends, one of them even being known as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." Hers was second only to the quite unique privilege of Mary, the mother of Jesus. What greater blessedness could any woman aspire to than that her son should be a St. John? We cannot believe that the mother on whom this rare favour was conferred shone only in its reflected radiance. That might be all she would pride herself upon. And yet there is something in heredity. When reading the biographies of men of mark, one is repeatedly struck with the fact that in the majority of instances they came of remarkable mothers. Monica is not solely noteworthy because she is the mother of Augustine. It is only just to say that Augustine became the greatest of the Fathers because Monica was his mother.

Most probably "the mother of Zebedee's children" was favoured with another relationship of singular interest.

[1] *Matt.* xx. 20–28.
[2] *Ibid.* xx. 20; xxvii. 56.
[3] xv. 40.
[4] xix. 25.

By comparing *Matthew* and *Mark* we learn that her name was Salome. In *Matthew* we read concerning the witnesses of the crucifixion: "And many women were there beholding from afar, which had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto Him: among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children."[1] In *Mark* the corresponding statement runs: "And there were also women beholding from afar: among whom were also Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome; who, when He was in Galilee, followed Him, and ministered unto Him"[2]—where Salome takes the place of "the mother of Zebedee's children." Now turn to *John*. In the fourth evangelist's account of the women at the crucifixion we read: "But there were standing by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene."[3] Here Christ's mother's sister seems to take the place of Salome. Another way of rendering it is to understand the phrase as in apposition with what follows—*i.e.* "Mary the wife of Clopas"—so that this Mary is regarded as the sister of the mother of Jesus. But if so there would be two sisters each having the name "Mary," a most improbable thing. Besides, in this passage of the fourth gospel the names seem to arrange themselves in two groups, each consisting of a pair connected with "and"—first "His mother and His mother's sister"; then "Mary the wife of Clopas and Mary Magdalene." The balance and symmetry are broken if "Mary the wife of Clopas" is detached from the second clause and joined to the "mother's sister." In some of the early versions of the gospels—the Syriac, the Persian, and the Ethiopic—there is a conjunction between the second and the third titles, plainly indicating that they stand for different persons.

It has been objected that Jesus would not commit Mary

[1] *Matt.* xxvii. 55, 56. [2] *Mark* xv. 40, 41. [3] *John* xix. 25.

to the charge of John with the phrase, "Behold thy mother," if John's actual mother were standing by at the time. On the other hand, if John were His cousin, and nephew to Mary, it would be the more natural that this disciple should take her to his home. Perhaps we should not regard the identification as absolutely certain. Still the indications point to a high degree of probability.

Here, then, we have the strong probability of a second point of great interest in connection with "the mother of Zebedee's children." Salome was sister to the Virgin Mary and aunt to Jesus. These two sisters were rare women, highly favoured, though in very different degrees. Our thoughts go back to their early days. We try to picture them in the home of their childhood at Nazareth. From what stock had they sprung? Tradition has encircled the parentage of the Virgin with a halo of sanctity, and in legends of the church her father and mother, known as Joachim and Anna, appear as saintly characters of rare excellence. These legends are not of any real historical value. Yet we may safely conclude that it was no ordinary home that produced two such daughters as Mary and Salome.

Then, it is natural to ask, where was Salome at the time of the wonders that accompanied the birth of Jesus? She may have been already married and away from Nazareth. In that case we should expect St. James, and perhaps St. John also, to be older than Jesus. That is not very probable. St. John is always represented in Christian art as a very young man in the time of Christ. Again we must beware of attaching too much weight to unauthoritative tradition. Still the solid historical evidence that he lived on till the end of the first century of the Christian era renders it very improbable that he could be older than Jesus. It is more likely, therefore, that Salome was a younger sister of Mary. If so she was a daughter at home at the time of the Annunciation. Was she near enough to

Mary in age for any sisterly confidences to be whispered between them at this most perplexing crisis? The journey of Mary to visit her kinswoman in the south country rather points to the conclusion that the Virgin had kept her secret to herself up till that time. But before long the younger sister must have known at least something of what was occurring in Bethlehem and at Nazareth; and it is not at all improbable that the two families met on several occasions during those silent years of the boyhood of Jesus and His humble work in the carpenter's shop.

Meanwhile Salome becomes the fisherman's wife at Bethsaida. She is not mentioned on the occasion when her two sons receive their call. The evangelists direct our attention to the fact that they left their father to follow Jesus, without making any mention of their mother. But subsequently she is found among the women who also followed the new Teacher and ministered to Him. We are left in the dark as to many points that we should like to be able to clear up. Did Salome accompany her sons from the first? Or was it that the home seemed empty without them, and the mother bird deserted her nest because it had lost its attraction to her when the young had flown? So was it her mother's love that first brought Salome into the circle of the influence of Jesus, where, however, before long she came to feel the spell of His Divine personality, and thus was led to become on her own account one of His most devoted disciples? If so the case is the reverse to that of Augustine and Monica. It is not that the mother leads her sons to Jesus Christ; but that more or less indirectly the sons bring their mother into discipleship. Then, we are driven to ask, what had become of the father? The Scriptures drop no hint of his ever having cast in his lot with the new movement. It is not so easy for a man in middle life to change the whole course of his habits. Jesus was a young man, and the majority of His disciples appear to have been young men. For the most part the Kingdom

of Heaven came as an inheritance of the young. It was the startling new light of a new age; and the elder men, with their rooted prejudices and their set, stiffened habits, were slow to adopt it. So Zebedee, we must fear, was untouched by the teaching that was making so great a stir by the shores of his familiar lake.

Now if Zebedee was not a believer he must have thought he had a grievance. First his sons leave him; then his wife follows. The home is completely broken up. Was not this hard for the head of the family? It is often said that he had his hired servants, a fact showing that he was not in needy circumstances, and would not be left in the lurch as far as his fishing business was concerned. But hired servants are a poor compensation for the loss of wife and sons.

Again we must suspend our judgment for the reason that we are most imperfectly acquainted with the facts. It may be that Zebedee had died in the interval between the call of the two brothers and their mother's flight from the home. If so she may have thought that since there was nothing more for her to live for in Bethsaida she would join her sons and devote herself to the cause with which they were identified. It is really uncharitable to entertain the idea, but it must be allowed as a bare possibility for the exoneration of Salome from blame in leaving her home, that Zebedee had behaved badly to his family, or at least had taken the going of his sons so ill that while his wife, mother-like, sided with the young men, there was a family quarrel, and Salome was driven to the extremity of going with her sons. It is idle to dwell on such possibilities. They are only worth naming to indicate how very ignorant we are as to the facts of the case, and therefore how impossible it is for us to form any judgment on them.

This, however, may be said quite apart from all such speculations. The coming of Jesus broke up old family ties while it introduced the new brotherhood of the Kingdom

of Heaven. He gave full warning that it must be so. While in the end there is no firmer foundation for the family life than a common loyalty to Jesus Christ among the members of the household, it must not be forgotten that the claims of Christ are paramount. At times they cannot but traverse the lines of natural relationship. Then the closest ties must not be permitted to interfere with them.

Following Jesus in the company of the women who were ministering to Him by the supply of the necessaries of life for Himself and His disciples, Salome must have heard much of His teaching. Thus she was led to the conclusion that He was the Christ. Certainly she had gained that great conviction before she came to Him towards the end of His ministry with her daring request.[1]

It is from *Matthew* alone that we learn of the action of the "mother of Zebedee's children" on this occasion. There is another account of the incident in *Mark*, where we read that James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus asking for the favour on their own account, and no mention is there made of their mother.[2] Therefore it must be allowed that at all events they had a share in the ambition. This is also apparent in *Matthew*, since even in that gospel the mother is accompanied by her sons when she begs the favour from Jesus. These sons were not children, and their presence carried with it their own share in the responsibility for what Salome said. But we are now concerned with the mother whose leading part in the incident is clearly brought out in *Matthew*.

On the face of it the request has an appearance of most unseemly greed. The mother approaches Jesus with her sons. She bows at His feet and tells Him that she has come to ask a certain thing of Him. It would almost seem that she wishes Him to grant her request before it is named. Jesus could not agree to so preposterous a demand. Kindness itself, He could not neglect the princi-

[1] *Matt.* xx. 20 ff. [2] *Mark* x. 35.

ples of wisdom. No prayer can be answered simply on demand. The saying that faith is a blank cheque on the bank of heaven is as false as it is irreverent.

Then Salome finds courage to express the desire of her heart. It is nothing less than that Jesus should command these her two sons whom she brings with her to sit, "the one on His right hand, the other on His left hand in His kingdom." No mother's ambition could soar higher than that. Salome was careful to approach Jesus at a time when He was not surrounded by the twelve. Yet the object of her errand leaked out probably through her own irrepressible maternal vanity. Naturally they were indignant.

But now let us look at the case all round. At the first blush of it the crudity of the ambition is amazing. It is so näive, so deliciously unconscious of its extravagance, so rarely blind to all other considerations than the yearnings of a mother's heart. But if this is all we see in the action of Salome we shall be guilty of great injustice to her. That her request was somewhat foolish is clear from the light thrown on it by the grave words of Jesus in His reply. She did not know what it involved; neither did she recognise the grounds on which such a future as she foreshadowed for her sons must be determined. So much we must grant, and the perception of it must have been not a little disconcerting to the fond mother.

Still there is more in her request than an expression of inordinate maternal ambition.

In the first place, as we have already seen, her action is an evidence of her unhesitating faith. She had received the tremendous truth that this peasant Prophet, her own nephew apparently, was the prophesied and long-expected Redeemer of Israel. His own brethren had not yet arrived at this stage; it wanted the resurrection to remove their doubts. But here is a relative who knows all about His early surroundings, and is not at all disconcerted by

their homeliness. Her faith in Him is quite definite and settled. The favour she begs for her sons is based on the assumption that He will certainly enter into His kingdom. Instead of under-estimating His authority she does what nobody else is ever recorded as having done, what we should have thought impossible, if we had not learnt it from the lips of Jesus Himself; she actually over-estimates it, ascribing to Him a function which He repudiates as the exclusive right of His Father. When we consider Christ's circumstances at the time and Salome's relationship with Him, must we not allow that this serene assurance of His lofty destiny is perfectly sublime?

But further the conversation which had immediately preceded this incident brings out the faith of "the mother of Zebedee's children" in the strongest possible relief. Jesus had just been predicting His rejection by the Jews, the outrageous treatment He was to receive at their hands, the scourging and crucifixion, and the resurrection that was to follow. He had foretold His death on one or two earlier occasions, with increasing fulness of detail as He drew nearer to the event. But this is the first occasion on which He named the awful word "crucify." Now immediately following on this terrible announcement comes Salome's daring request. "Then," says the evangelist, "*then* came to Him the mother of Zebedee's children, &c." It would seem that His very words about the approaching events at Jerusalem had stirred her up to seek the favour. It was as they were on the road to Jerusalem that Jesus made this more full statement concerning His destiny, and He prefaced it with the words, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem," that is to say, He made it clear that the very journey He was then pursuing was to lead to the end of which He was speaking. Yet even this does not disconcert the confident woman's faith. She is not dismayed at the sudden vision of the cross. We cannot imagine the ghastliness of the vision that word "crucify" would con-

jure up in the cruel days of Roman brutality, the pale horror of the future it would represent. It was more frightful than if one were to speak calmly to-day about having to put his head through the hangman's noose. And yet with that horror just presented to her imagination, the very first thing Salome does is to proffer a request for her sons' share in the kingly distribution of honours by this Man who is about to be tortured and dragged to a felon's death. How shall we account for so remarkable a juxtaposition of incongruous ideas?

Was it that Salome absolutely refused to accept the dreadful prophecy, in her request assuming the impossibility of any such thing taking place? Possibly, and yet our Lord's answer takes no note of any apparent rejection of His words. It is more probable that she accepted them. Then how are we to take her request in the light of the depressing information she had just received? May we suppose that she hung it on the last statement, the prediction of the resurrection? If so her faith had taken a higher flight than that of any other disciple, or at least higher than the faith of any but her two sons who accompanied her in the request. Perhaps it would be safer to conclude that Salome had no such definite conception. It was enough for her that Jesus was undoubtedly the Christ. Therefore He must have His kingdom. What He had just said contained much that was very unlike Messianic glory. She could not reconcile these things. But she was willing to leave them unreconciled, as beyond her comprehension. She knew that nothing could upset the kingly destiny of the Christ. That is faith triumphant, a light in the cloud above the blackest storm.

There is yet another idea that may be brought in from the singular conjunction of Christ's prediction and Salome's request. If she attached any meaning to His words, if she did not thrust them back as absolutely unbelievable, they must have entered in some dim way into her concep-

tion of the Messianic glory and the road to it. Jesus pointed out that her sons did not know what they were asking. Salome could not know what her request involved. No one could imagine the bitterness of the cup He was to drink, or the severity of the baptism with which He was to be consecrated. Yet the mother and her sons must have seen that some dread ordeal was before Him, and their subsequent words show that the two young men were willing to share its unseen possibilities. As all three seem to have been of one mind in the request, the mother as well as the sons must have been willing that some hard and painful road should be travelled in reaching the coveted honour. To persevere with the request in face of such a prospect required more than faith; it demanded courage, a rare and heroic courage. There is something of the Spartan mother in Salome. Honour she covets for her sons; but not merely the gilded favour of a court, rather such honour as the general distributes to the survivors of his faithful staff who gather round him with the blood of the battle upon them. She is like the Roman matron whose proudest hour is when she sends forth her sons to die for their country, although hers is the hope of a larger faith, since she is well assured that in some way totally incomprehensible to her the ultimate issue will be the glory of a kingdom.

Nevertheless, when all this is said, there remains the unpleasant selfishness of this request. It is selfish on the part of the brothers; and it is now also in some degree selfish on the part of the mother! Family selfishness is a most subtle weakness. When we meet with it in connection with a more remote relationship we condemn it unhesitatingly, branding it with the ugly name "nepotism." It is not so easy to detect the evil of it under the guise of that most unselfish of all passions, a mother's love. And yet while truly unselfish as regards her own individual affairs, a mother is really in a sense selfish in making undue demands for her own children.

But even here we may do injustice to Salome. She was not asking for her sons any favour which might be considered unreasonable in comparison with the claims of the other disciples. Already they were more than of the twelve; they were of the inner group of three. Besides, in the fourth gospel St. John is described as the beloved disciple, and as the one who leaned on the bosom of Jesus. We must not think of this as only an attitude of affection. When reclining at a feast, leaning on his left elbow, anybody might be described as in the bosom of the person on whose right hand he was placed. This was St. John's usual position in relation to his Lord. He always sat on the right hand of Jesus. And now, which disciple occupied the other post of honour, the left side of the Lord? The scene at the mention of the traitor during the last supper makes it apparent that it was not St. Peter, for that disciple had to beckon to St. John to ask Jesus who the traitor was. But it is most likely that it would have been one of the three. We are led then to the conclusion that in all probability St. James sat on the left of Jesus, so that while John leaned on the bosom of Jesus, Jesus leaned on the bosom of James. That is to say, the two brothers already occupied the very positions which Salome was asking for them. Her request comes to this, that the places they have held on earth in the time of their Master's humiliation may be continued to them in the coming kingdom when He is glorified. Will the fishermen friends be owned still as the King's most choice companions? And among the disciples, may they still retain their peculiar privilege?

St. Peter was the nearest rival. His impulsive nature often led him to assume a foremost place; and on some occasions Jesus had seemed to allow it him, describing him in his faith and confession as the rock on which He would build His church,[1] and perhaps alluding to him as the

[1] *Matt.* xvi. 18.

doorkeeper who was called on to be especially watchful in a position of trust.[1] Salome might have feared that her quieter, less assuming sons would be thrust aside at last in favour of the more pushing comrade and his brother Andrew. These four were the first-made disciples. Salome knew Andrew and Simon well; they had been partners with her sons in their trade. Possibly there had been an old rivalry between the two pairs of brothers. Or if this had not been the case it was not unnatural that the mother of one pair should feel a little jealous of the honour she thought due to her own sons falling to the other two young fishermen. This all looks very small and quite unworthy of the lofty aims of apostles. But Jesus had occasion to rebuke the miserable disputes of His disciples as to who was to be greatest among them.[2]

Jesus made it clear that Salome was making a foolish request. In the first place she did not know what she was asking. She had no idea of the real nature of the petition she was urging so decidedly; neither did she in the least perceive what would be involved in granting it. It is not wise for parental ambition to be too definite. The future shrouds strange possibilities. It is safest to leave them with God.

In the second place, Jesus distinctly declared that it was not His part to grant such a favour. This distribution of final honours was entirely in the hands of His Father. As a matter of fact the slow unrolling of events declared a result of which Salome could not have dreamed. The star that was destined to shine most brightly in the kingdom of heaven was still below the horizon. How far was this fond mother from imagining that there was then at Jerusalem a young Jew of good family and rabbinic culture devoting himself intensely to the practice of pharisaic piety, who was destined before many years to be the foremost leader in the cause of Christ? And yet to us

[1] *Mark* xiii. 34. [2] *Mark* ix. 34.

who look back on those far-off times in the light of subsequent history, it would seem that the man whom God, in the mystery of His counsels, had chosen to sit on the right hand of the Christ, was neither James nor John, nor any one of the twelve, but the persecutor Saul. Nor does even the second place in the kingdom seem to have been assigned to either of the sons of Zebedee; for great as is the glory of being the first apostolic martyr that fell to the lot of St. James, and venerable as was the position of St. John in his old age at Ephesus, history marks as more prominent leaders of the church, first, St. Peter, the spokesman at Pentecost and before the council, and then that other James—"the Lord's brother," who at this time was no apostle, and not even a believer. It appears then that the mother's wish was not granted.

Still, it may be argued, she came very near to having her desire satisfied. Her elder son was the first apostle to win the martyr's crown. Where was his mother when James was chosen by Herod as the most dangerous Galilean? She had heard her sons' courageous acceptance of companionship with their Master in His sufferings. Did she think of this when James was drinking the cup of persecution and receiving the baptism of blood? It was thus that her first-born went to his seat of honour. Her second son, John, had the glory of writing the gospel of richest inspiration and deepest spiritual insight, of being in fact the author of the greatest book in all literature. Surely these were honours enough to satisfy a mother's ambition. And yet neither of them was what Salome contemplated when she came to Jesus with her bold request. From the first of them she must have shrunk with the agony of nature's protest. This was too much like the destiny of her sister, the Mother of Sorrows, when, as Simeon had prophesied, the sword pierced her soul.

It is by a natural instinct that a mother wishes the best

for her children; it is with a beautiful infirmity that she believes in them as worthy of the best. Alas! disillusion and disappointment too often follow these fond dreams, and therein is the deep pathos of that most Divine thing on earth, a mother's love. And yet because it is Divine in its likeness to the yearning love of God—though that can never be deceived, being linked to the all-seeing wisdom of God—this love is an inspiration for the most earnest endeavours after a life that shall not overwhelm it in shame and despair. Such love must prompt the children who have learnt to appreciate it to strive to prevent the disillusion from being too complete and the disappointment too bitter. Nor can we believe that a Salome's prayer, short-sighted and imperfect as it was, was wholly in vain. The old bishop whom Monica consulted in her anxiety about Augustine was right when he comforted her with the assurance, "Go thy ways, and God bless thee, for it is not possible that the son of these tears should perish."[1]

[1] Augustine, *Confessions*, Book iii. 21.

CHAPTER XIII

The Sisters—A Family Contrast

WE meet with that most interesting of all New Testament households, the Bethany family, on three occasions in the course of the gospel history. Twice the sisters are brought together on the scene; in the third case the younger only appears. This statement goes on the assumption that the Mary and Martha of St. Luke are the same two sisters whom St. John brings before us in his account of the raising of Lazarus; it also rests on that evangelist's identification of the woman anointing Jesus with the costly spikenard, whose name is not given in the two synoptic accounts of the incident—*Matthew* and *Mark*—with Mary of Bethany.

The connection of the three incidents with the same family is not so absolutely certain as is commonly supposed; at least there have been careful readers to whom it has appeared more than doubtful. St. Luke, it may be observed, only gives us the earlier incident—that in which Mary sits at the feet of Jesus while Martha is cumbered with much serving, an incident which we meet with in his gospel alone—this evangelist neither mentioning the raising of Lazarus, which is not referred to in any of the synoptics, nor giving the anointing in the last week at Jerusalem which the other two synoptics record. In introducing his story he does not fix the locality at Bethany; he simply says that "as they went on their way" Jesus "entered into *a certain village*," not naming the place, apparently for the reason that he does not know where it is. But since he inserts the incident in the course of his account of a

tour in Galilee, the impression left on the mind of an unprejudiced reader would naturally be that the unknown village was situated somewhere in that district. Hence harmonists have suggested that the family had been living at the earlier period in Galilee and had subsequently moved to the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, while, on the other hand, there have not been wanting critics who have pounced on the seeming discrepancy as an evidence of the untrustworthiness of the fourth gospel, the author of which, they have suggested, has arbitrarily transported Mary and Martha from the north county to Bethany. But surely it is enough to suppose that St. Luke inserts his incident where it occurs in his gospel with its vague indication of locality because there was nothing in the source from which he derived it to determine where it occurred. It may be remarked that immediately before this he gives the parable of the Good Samaritan, the scene of which is laid in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, and which therefore would be most appropriately spoken by our Lord in that locality. May it be that both of these two paragraphs come from some fragmentary notes of one of Christ's visits to Jerusalem which failed to state the locality to which they belonged?

There is not only the fact of the names being the same, and Martha is by no means so common a name as Mary. The distinctive traits of character which come out with startling vividness in the third gospel are repeatedly suggested by more delicate hints in the fourth, raising the probability practically to a certainty that we have the same pair of sisters introduced to us in each case. This should appear as we proceed with a brief study of the three incidents.

I. *The Family Difference.*[1]

St. Luke represents Martha as a hospitable woman who receives Jesus into her house, implying that she is the proprietress. But, by comparing the accounts of the anointing

[1] *Luke* x. 38–42.

in *Matthew* and *Mark* with that in *John* which connects it with Mary of Bethany, we are led to the conclusion that this earlier incident probably occurred in what the first two evangelists call "the house of Simon the leper,"[1] and hence to the supposition that Simon was either the father of the two sisters, or more probably Martha's husband. Yet Martha appears here as the head of the household taking upon her to invite the honoured Guest. Either she was a widow or hers was a more mournful fate, the fate of a woman tied for life to a leper. She might have obtained a divorce now that the domestic ties were relaxed under the Roman dominion; but it was not permissible under the Jewish law for a wife to divorce herself, though the husband enjoyed a large liberty in this matter, and it is probable that Martha would have been both too scrupulous and too kind-hearted to avail herself of the laxity of the manners of her day. Of course Simon would have been required to separate himself from all the homes of healthy people. If he were still living, and these were the circumstances of the case, surely we must admire the brave woman who did not sink down in despair under the burden of her terrible trouble. Her energy and eagerness to do the best she could with the means of hospitality left in her hands are the more commendable, seeing that she had an ample excuse for shutting herself up in selfish grief. True, it may be said that was not at all the sort of life which would attract a woman of Martha's active temperament. Still it is to her credit that she would not make her own great trouble an excuse for selfish indifference to the claims of others. And then, if this surmise is correct, may we not make some allowance for Martha's irritability? She had passed through a most distressing experience, perhaps she was weighted with a grievous burden. Is it surprising that her nerves were not the most placid?

This brave, warm-hearted, hospitable woman, hearing

[1] *Matt.* xxvi. 6; *Mark* xiv. 3; *John* xii. 1.

that Jesus the Prophet, of whom so much was rumoured, was passing through her village, invited Him to her house. Possibly it was His first introduction to the Bethany household, a household which was to become His favourite refuge during subsequent visits to Jerusalem. St. Luke does not say whether the twelve accompanied their Master. This was usually the case; and if it were done in the present instance, the providing for thirteen men would involve no little domestic labour. Still it may be, as the words of the evangelist seem to imply, that Jesus went alone on this occasion, to be the sole recipient of Martha's hospitality. In any case the feast was entirely in honour of Him, and the hostess's anxiety was solely on His account —this His words of remonstrance imply.

The evangelist sets the simple scene very vividly before our eyes—the energetic woman busying about in the preparation of the meal, hot, flustered, worried—her sister Mary sitting all the while in calm unconcern for the preparations that are going on, absorbed in listening to the words that fall from the lips of the great Teacher. Nobody can be surprised that Martha is vexed. It is not as though she would not enjoy the rare privilege of sitting at the feet of Jesus which her sister monopolises while the elder woman feels the duties of hospitality compel her to be less agreeably employed. Does Mary think she prefers to be at this vexatious drudgery, and so miss the hearing of the words of gold that fall from the lips of Jesus—a grievous mistake? But she must do her duty to her Guest. If Mary would but help her now, after the meal was over they could sit down together and listen to the glorious talk that she, mistress of the house as she is, must now necessarily miss. It does look a hard case for Martha.

There is no more significant illustration of the change of views with regard to the comparative merits of the active and the contemplative lives that has come over the church in modern times than the fact that, while formerly people

felt no difficulty in admitting that Mary had chosen the better part, and even in going beyond Jesus and doing what He refrained from doing, directly blaming Martha for her hospitable toil, in the present day everybody champions Martha, and some are prepared to be not a little severe on Mary, accusing her of inconsiderate selfishness.

We must be on our guard, however, against ignoring the judgment of Christ on the family difference. It seems clear that poor Martha had lost her temper. Instead of quietly calling Mary to her assistance she complained to her Guest of her sister's conduct, actually seeking His interference to secure the aid that was not forthcoming voluntarily. That was not very seemly. And Martha's distress rose out of her great eagerness to honour Jesus to the utmost, with the very best of her hospitality. Meanwhile possibly some things had gone awry in the kitchen department. At all events she was dreadfully put about. It is rather hard that her hasty utterance has been chronicled against her for all time. Still the two facts remain—Jesus gently rebuked Martha; Jesus warmly defended Mary. No doubt in part He was prompted to act thus by a feeling of chivalry, for He was placed by Martha's unwisdom in a position that would have been very difficult for any one who did not possess at once consummate tact and the insight of perfect sympathy. Jesus defended Mary because she was attacked by Martha in their common home, and that in the presence of a Stranger. Had the case been reversed, had Mary complained of Martha, it is likely He would have had a word of rebuke for the quietist, and a cheery sentence in honour of the busy hostess.

We must go further, however. Jesus did more than pour oil on the troubled water. Had this been His sole aim He might have found more effective means; for unless Martha had been of the generous disposition with which we may venture to credit her she might have resented the manner of her Guest as unfair and unkind. It was nothing

of the sort; but then it was more than a mere defence of the younger sister.

Jesus first expostulates with Martha. He does it in a kindly way, perhaps with a smile, but also with a little touch of regret. Why make all this trouble? He really does not need it. When we follow the text of the oldest and best authorities the sentence of Jesus becomes, "Martha, Martha, thou art anxious and troubled about many things, but few things are needful, or one."[1] The "few" things would be in contrast with the "many" things with which, as St. Luke tells us, Martha was troubled. Jesus thinks that Martha is preparing a needlessly sumptuous meal, one much more elaborate than necessary, especially considering the cost of it to the hostess in trouble and temper. Then the few things would be a few dishes. Jesus really does not care to see a great display of viands got together in honour of Himself. Much less would suffice; nay, a single dish would be enough. That was all He had been accustomed to at the frugal table in the carpenter's cottage at Nazareth. He has no inclination to be the object of lavish hospitality. Had He not said on another occasion, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to accomplish His work"?[2] and had He not warned His disciples not to toil for the meat that perisheth? It was another thing when the labour was lovingly bestowed by generous hands for the sake of honouring Him. Still this was not the sort of honour He cared for, and He certainly could not accept it at the cost of a spoilt temper and a family quarrel. Wordsworth's ideal of "plain living and high thinking" is much nearer to the mind of Jesus. We may learn this lesson for the benefit of our own personal manners; but it is not so easy to apply to hospitality. To one of Martha's disposition it would be very difficult.

[1] This is the reading of the two oldest MSS., the Vatican and the Sinaitic, as well as of some others of value. It is supported by two ancient Egyptian versions; and it is found in Origen, *i.e.*, as early as the beginning of the third century.

[2] *John* iv. 34.

What Jesus said of Mary implies that the younger sister had understood Him better than His well-meaning hostess. "Mary has chosen the good part"—not the "better"; there is no direct comparison to excite jealousy. Looked at by itself, without invidious contrasts, Mary's choice is good. Still, of course, the mental comparison is inevitable. Fussy hospitality is but a weariness to One whose life is wholly concerned with the Kingdom of Heaven. Sympathy with His ideas is more refreshing to the soul of Jesus than sumptuous fare at the table. Mary, of whom Tennyson writes—

> "Her eyes are homes of silent prayer,"

has a soul so rare, so choice, that she should be forgiven even some negligence of what might naturally be regarded as her domestic duty, even some want of perception of practical difficulties close at hand. She is so absorbed in the great truths she is drinking in from the discourse of the Teacher that she does not perceive her sister's trouble. The clatter of the dishes falls unheeded on her ears. She does not even see poor Martha as the good housewife hurries to and fro working herself into a perfect fever. She is simply blind to the angry glances that are darted on her. She is in another world. Perhaps this her rapture is untimely; perhaps she ought to be more awake to what is going on around her; perhaps she is blameworthy in these matters. Still it is not to be denied that of all things Jesus delights in, none are better than humble discipleship. Service He looks for; His people are not to be quietists. But service must follow discipleship, not precede it; otherwise it will go in mistaken lines, wasting itself on efforts which, though well meaning, are yet unwise. Therefore the situation is not adequately expressed in the lines that would combine the excellences of the two characters as—

> "A Mary in the house of God,
> A Martha in her own."

It is true there are the more suitable times and scenes for contemplation, and others best fitted for action; but every home should be a house of God, and all service inspired with Mary's submissive discipleship, and freed from Martha's needless turmoil.

II. *At the Grave.*[1]

We must not press too far the proverb that bids us learn the direction of a current from a straw. It is only true of a surface current, and even with regard to that we may be misled by an eddy or a backwater. Superficial signs do not always reveal the flow of the strong river in its hidden depths. Introduced to a house for an hour we catch a glimpse of the play of character among the members of the family, very marked divergencies possibly appearing. But it would be dangerous to conclude from this hasty, casual observation that we had been permitted to penetrate to the secret of the home. It may be, probably it is, the case that the true character of the family is quite other than what these trifles of the moment reveal so obviously. We may live with a person for years without really knowing him, until perhaps at some unexpected turn a crisis arrives, stirring him to the depths, and then to our surprise there are revealed strange proofs of unsuspected heroism or cowardice, selfishness or nobility of soul. The earthquake rends a great cleft in the character, laying open to the day strata never previously seen.

Such an earthquake occurred in the quiet household at Bethany in the illness and death of a beloved brother and its marvellous sequel. Then the first thing that we notice is that the two sisters, who seemed to be so totally divergent in temperament, wide apart as the poles, in St. Luke's simple anecdote about a momentary family difference, are really at heart quite united in their deeper thoughts as in twin minds, the echo one of the other.

[1] *John* xi. 17–44.

It is clear too from this revelation by the grave-side that the Bethany household—consisting in the two sisters with their brother Lazarus—was knit together by the closest ties of affection, so that we must think of that earlier incident as quite exceptional, or at all events as transitory and superficial, a mere passing cloud obscuring for but a moment the brightness of the home. But now a real breach of another kind has appeared. Death has broken up the trio, snatching away the beloved brother; a lad, we may suppose him, over whom the sisters had watched with maternal care after the death of their mother. When, alarmed at the course of his illness, they had sent to Jesus, their appeal had been exceptionally touching. They thought their brother to be a special object of the Master's affection. This loved youth was sick. Surely it was enough for Jesus to know the fact to hasten to the bedside. They sent in faith, in perfect confidence. Here they were united. However different their ways of showing their regard when Jesus had been in their home on the previous occasion, they were now both devoted to Christ; He was for both the refuge in trouble; both believed that He could help in the hour of supreme need. Great then must have been their common surprise at His delay. Surely He must have regarded such a message as they had sent Him with the deepest concern. To love it would seem imperative. They could not imagine that any other concerns would be preferred by Him as more important. Thus grief tends to a certain narrowness, and love may be narrow too in its very intensity. For there *were* other concerns of which the sisters in their absorbing anxiety did not dream, and yet which Jesus considered important enough to detain Him.

Not thinking for a moment of the possibility of anything of the kind, the sisters are bitterly disappointed at His quite unaccountable delay. Hour after hour passes. Ample time has now elapsed for the messenger to carry the sum-

mons and for Jesus to come in response to it. Yet there is no sign of His approach. And Lazarus grows worse and yet worse. How severe a strain this is upon them! Is Mary calm now? Is Martha flustered? In these terrible hours there is no difference between them. As they watch their brother sinking, and the great horror approaches, they talk together in hushed voices. If only the Master would come even now it might not be too late! Had He not wrought wonderful cures on hopeless patients? Oh! what can be keeping Him at such a time? And so it goes on to the end. Jesus does not come; and Lazarus dies. The climate requires speedy burial and the body is quickly laid in its tomb.

And now all the ceremony of Eastern mourning is carried on in the house, doubtless with hired flute-players and loud wailing; and friends come out from Jerusalem to take part; for the family seems to be well known to a large circle, and of some social importance. In the midst of this, to us, most unseemly tumult, Jesus draws near to Bethany. He could hear the music and the wailing long before He reached the village, and He would know what it meant. Their grief and anxiety had been so absorbing, that the sisters had not stayed to reflect how highly dangerous it was for Jesus to appear in public at this time anywhere in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem. He was like an outlaw with a price set on His head. So knowing that many of His enemies must be in that large company of mourners, since His time had not yet come, Jesus prudently remained in the outskirts, sending to Martha a private message announcing His arrival. We read that Martha went to meet Him, while Mary sat still in the house.

The difference of action has been pointed out as a sign of vital differences of character. Martha rises and goes forth; Mary sits in doors—the one sister prompt and energetic, the other sedentary and inactive. But this is not a fair criticism. It is clear that the message was only

brought to Martha. We may wonder that she did not at once tell her sister. It would seem that the coming of Jesus put all other thoughts out of her mind. But as soon as she had returned home she sought out Mary and told her secretly that the Master had come, and was calling for her. Plainly, Mary did not know it before. How then can we found any inference as to her character on the fact that she did not go out as promptly as her sister had gone? The message had been delivered to Martha as the head of the house, and to her alone. But now, no sooner does Mary know of the arrival of Jesus than she gets up at once and goes out to Him. "She arose quickly,"[1] we read. In the Sinai Syriac Manuscript this sentence becomes, "And when Mary heard she sprang up and went to Him eagerly." The same eager, emotional character is revealed in the moment of meeting her Lord; and here no doubt we may observe a difference of temperament between the two sisters. Mary falls at the feet of Jesus; nothing of the kind is recorded of the more matter-of-fact Martha.

But when it came to uttering what was in their hearts the two used almost precisely identical words, revealing how intimately they had talked the matter over, and how completely they were of one mind with regard to it. If only Jesus had been there Lazarus would not have died. Of that they were perfectly assured, so clear was their faith. Now He had come—but it was too late!

It is Martha who receives the great words from Jesus about the resurrection. She takes His promise that Lazarus shall rise again with dreary acquiescence, supposing it to be a conventional consolation referring to the orthodox Jewish doctrine of a general resurrection at the end of the world. There is little comfort for her in that. It is true enough. She knows it already. Has she not been taught it from her childhood? But that mysterious event is very remote. If only Jesus had been in time she would have had her brother restored to her in this life, a very different

[1] *John* xi. 29.

thing. Then Jesus proceeds to His own profound teaching about the resurrection.

Resurrection is by no means to be regarded as a matter of course, certain to be enjoyed by all Jews. The true resurrection is in Christ. He is its source. They who would share it must have faith in Him. Can Martha receive this? Yes, for she believes in Christ. Her faith is implicit. The words of Jesus are too great and wonderful to be fully taken in at once, and it may not be easy to accept what is perceived in them on its own account. But Martha has full faith in Christ, and on that ground she does not hesitate to assent to what He says. She believes that Jesus is no other than the Christ, the Son of God, the Great One expected by her people. Such a clear confession as this, uttered under circumstances of the greatest depression, at once places the speaker in the very front rank of the disciples of Jesus. It may be set side by side with St. Peter's historic confession at Cæsarea Philippi. The wonder of it is that this glorious outburst of faith was possible at the very time when the inexplicable conduct of Jesus was the occasion of the keenest disappointment. That is what marks Martha's faith as sublime. It would not have been at all surprising if a faith which under ordinary circumstances was serene and settled should have been disturbed and overclouded at such a moment as this. Had it been so we could have pardoned the distressed sister, setting down to her love for her brother and the intense grief of a loss which she thought Jesus might have prevented, some temporary lack of confidence in the Master who had tried her so severely. There is nothing of the kind. The earthly scene is gloomy as the grave; but not a shadow passes over her heavens. Faith rises triumphant, and in spite of an amazing disappointment perceives with clear vision and declares with unfaltering voice the supreme truth that He who was the very occasion of the disappointment was the Christ of God. Could more be expected of any Christian?

A little later, at the tomb, Martha hesitates to permit a

command of Jesus to be executed. It would not be wise to roll away the stone. Lazarus has been dead too long. The dreadful discovery must not be made. Here we see her practical, sensible way of regarding affairs, interfering from a mundane standpoint with the submission of faith to which all things are possible. We may suppose that no such considerations would have disturbed Mary's rapt attention, which was wholly concentrated on her Master. But this again is rather a question of temperament than one of character.

III. *The Anointing.*[1]

The third incident is recorded in two of the synoptics—*Matthew* and *Mark*—as well as in St. John's gospel; but it is only the latter book that connects it with the family of Martha and Mary. In the synoptics we read that it was in Bethany, but at the house of Simon the leper, and there it is only narrated anonymously, the adoring disciple who comes with the costly ointment and anoints the head of Jesus being simply described as "a woman." Still the close similarity of the details makes it quite unquestionable that the same occurrence is referred to in all three cases.

We have seen already that the synoptic description of the house where the anointing occurred as belonging to "Simon the leper" may be accounted for on the supposition that Simon was either the father of Lazarus and his sisters or Martha's husband, and either deceased by the time of the gospel narrative, or removed because of his terrible affliction.

From the fuller account in the fourth gospel we gather that the feast at which the anointing occurred was given especially in honour of Jesus, and the significant mention of the presence of Lazarus plainly suggests that the occasion was the joy and gratitude of the sisters at the restoration of their brother from the grave. Both the sisters now do honour to the Saviour from death—each in her own characteristic way. The resemblance to St. Luke's earlier

[1] *Matt.* xxvi. 6–13; *Mark* xiv. 3–9; *John* xii. 1–5.

narrative is most significant, not close enough to be a mere imitation, yet so near as to bring out the very same traits of character. We find Martha again serving, and Mary once more showing her devotion to Jesus in a less practical yet most personal way. But on this occasion Martha does not make the mistake of complaining of her sister to Jesus. She has learnt her lesson. Mary brings very costly ointment of so rich a fragrance that the whole house is filled with the delicious scent when she breaks her alabaster vessel and pours the contents over the head of the Guest. Judas calculates that it must have cost as much as three hundred *denarii*. If a *denarius* were equal to a day's wages in purchasing power this would be about enough to keep a family for a twelvemonth. It would be half as much again as the amount the disciples had thought would be required to provide food for the five thousand whom Jesus had commanded them to feed in the wilderness.[1] Is it then astonishing that, as we gather from the synoptic accounts, others besides Judas thought Mary's action extravagant? For people who have been brought up in straitened circumstances, accustomed from childhood to the most frugal fare, and taught to look at every penny before they spend it, it is very difficult to estimate fairly the freer use of money by persons in easy circumstances. So for the second time Mary's intense devotion to Jesus brings blame upon her. She is accused of wastefulness. But it is not a little rude in guests thus to criticise one of the ladies of the house; and once again Jesus defends Mary. We may say in this second place, as on the former occasion, that the first motive which prompted Him was His chivalry.

If He had been consulted beforehand our Lord might have taken a different view of the anointing. Which would He prefer, that three hundred *denarii* should be spent on a luxury for Himself, or that it should be used for supplying bread to the hungry? Who can doubt what His answer would have been? who can suppose that He who never

[1] *Mark* vi. 37.

once sought comfort, or pleasure, or honour for Himself would have chosen the luxury of a costly anointing in preference to the feeding of a starving family? But He had not been consulted, and now the deed was done, and the warm-hearted woman who had made this offering was being attacked for her extravagance. He could not do anything but defend her. Mary had not made any calculation in comparative economics. She was not a member of a Charity Organisation Society. When we admit that it would have been to her credit if she had been, still the fact remains that she did not calculate, that she did not stay to consider whether some other way of spending this particular sum of money might not go further in promoting the greatest happiness of the greatest number. She acted simply out of a passion of grateful devotion to Jesus Christ, which kept all other thoughts out of her mind. Grant, if you will, that she was extravagant. Still could Jesus permit her to be blamed for what after all was but the extravagance of love? Love cannot but be extravagant. This was the language of emotion. When emotion stays to calculate it ceases to be emotion. You cannot audit the accounts of love. Set them out in a banker's ledger, and the passion that inspires them vanishes.

Therefore Jesus defended Mary from a most rude and unjust attack. The honour she was doing to Him was unsought; but being offered it could not be rejected. And our Lord did more than simply defend Mary. He gave a new and unexpected turn to her action. The anointing was to be for His burial. Did Mary intend this solemn meaning to be attached to it? Thomas had recognised that a journey to Jerusalem could now only be undertaken with extreme risk;[1] but in the agony of their anxiety the sisters had not stayed to reflect on any such consequence of their Master's coming at their request. Afterwards, however, they must have awakened to the extremity of the danger into which they had plunged Him. And now He was

[1] *John* xi. 16.

again with them the thought of this peril could not be absent. Moreover, He had given His disciples distinct warnings of the approaching end. It is quite likely therefore that the apprehension of a near parting made this sensitive woman the more eager to render the utmost possible honour to her Lord during the short time that she still might have Him with her.

Nevertheless, it may be said, while Jesus could not but deal gently with Mary considering the motive of her action, it was a mistake, for the poor would suffer loss by this piece of extravagance. Would they? Are we so sure that Mary had taken the money for the purchase of the ointment out of a charity purse, the contents of which were strictly limited? Would her needy neighbours be any worse off for the fact that she was warmly devoted to Christ? Is not devotion to Christ the strongest motive for kindness to our fellow-creatures? It will be a hard day for the poor when they are left to the tender mercies of calculators of the Judas order. It is in the Marys that they have ever found their best friends. Besides, so long as there is a particle of extravagance left in the matter of private expenditure, so long as there is any allowance for luxury, any disbursement beyond what is required for the barest necessaries of life, there will be room for escape from a hard economy in religious gifts without trenching on the portion of the poor. Mr. Ruskin sets this idea before us in a famous passage which cannot be quoted too often:—"I say this, emphatically, that the tenth part of the expense which is sacrificed in domestic vanities, if not absolutely and meaninglessly lost in domestic discomforts and incumbrances, would, if collectively offered and wisely employed, build a marble church for every town in England; such a church as it would be a joy and a blessing even to pass near in our daily ways and walks, and as it would bring the light into the eyes to see from afar, lifting its fair height above the purple crowd of humble roofs."[1]

[1] *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, 3rd edition (in small form), p. 32.

CHAPTER XIV

The Widow with Two Mites—True Giving[1]

PART of the charm of the gospels is in the delightful simplicity with which incidents that the historian of the grand style would treat as too trivial for notice have come to be preserved in these sacred records side by side with events of vast and world-wide importance. The family difference at Bethany is one of these; the scene of the widow giving her two mites is another. We cannot compare them with the Transfiguration, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection. And yet they fall quite naturally into their places in the same narrative that records those marvellous events. They even stand out with equal clearness, set before us in as bright a light, like the flowers at the foot of old Pre-Raffaelite pictures, which are as carefully drawn and as full of colour and light as the faces of the saints and angels in the centre of the canvas.

But the curious point is that these minor incidents, thus standing in the most prominent position for all the world to see, do not appear trivial or out of place. It might be said that everything Jesus touched turned to gold, or at least that the smallest thing He took notice of revealed under His gaze a hitherto unsuspected wealth of meaning. Things are great or small according to the character of the eye that regards them. While Wordsworth writes of Peter Bell—

> "A primrose by the river's brim
> A yellow primrose was to him,
> And it was nothing more;"

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[1] *Mark* xii. 41–44; *Luke* xxi. 1–4.

the poet could say of himself—

> "Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
> Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,
> To me the meanest flower that blows can give
> Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."

These minor gospel incidents are not unique in themselves until Christ has something to do with them. Then they suddenly leap into intense significance. Many a family has seen a sisterly difference like that which for a moment disturbed the affectionate relationship of Mary and Martha; it is not to be supposed that the one widow whom Jesus saw casting her mites into the treasury at the temple was the only person who ever manifested so much generosity in the midst of poverty. But our Lord came into some relation with both incidents, with the first actively, with the second only in making His comment. In both cases His connection with the simple events fills them with significance. The smallest plot of land, the cottager's garden, has one relation with infinity—its outlook to the sky. Wherever Jesus went He opened that outlook even into the most cramped scenes.

He was at the temple, seated in the court of the women. A succession of critics had been plying Him with questions. First there had come a group in unwonted partnership, like Greeks and Trojans joining arms against a common victim, certain of the Pharisees united with the party of Herod. Both venomous as a brood of vipers, they had contrived a subtle attempt to draw Jesus into the utterance of a sentence that the Roman magistrate would reckon treasonable, with the alternative of rejecting His country's cause and renouncing the Messianic hope. Next had come a party of the rival Sadducees with a question in casuistry that mocked at the resurrection. These had been followed by one of the scribes with a more serious question concerning the first commandment of all. Jesus had worsted His foes one after the other as soon as they

had presented their cases, with replies characterised by dialectic skill as well as spiritual insight. The last of His questioners had taken himself off. For the moment He was in peace. But the strain of these successive contests must have left Him weary and exhausted.

He was sitting thus with His eyes closed or perhaps His head bent forward on one of His hands, when somebody came by whom He knew instinctively to be more after His mind. Looking up He saw a poor widow approaching one of the thirteen great treasure-chests with their trumpet-shaped mouths—sufficient to receive all the gifts of the great multitude of worshippers who thronged the temple in times of high festival. She was a widow and in the extremity of poverty. How did Jesus know this? Perhaps her widowhood was apparent in her dress, and it would not be difficult to see that she was one of the poor. But the knowledge of Jesus goes beyond these general, more obvious facts. He who had seen Nathaniel under the fig-tree, and told the woman of Samaria the sad story of her life, and read the dark secret of the heart of Judas, and discerned the mental processes of His disputing antagonists on several occasions, had powers of discovering the thoughts and intents of the heart quite beyond our comprehension. And yet in the present instance it is legitimate to surmise that this widow may have been an obscure disciple whom Jesus had met before, perhaps on more than one occasion. There must have been many of these humble followers with whom He was acquainted, although they have never found their way into immortality by appearing in the brief pages of the four gospels.

As He watched Jesus saw a number of wealthy persons casting in large amounts, now holding them ostentatiously in their hands and now dropping them significantly with the ring of heavy coins. He perceived the irony of the situation, how diametrically opposite the truth was from the appearance. To the casual observer these were the

great contributors, and the gift of the poor woman was scarcely worth the having. While to her it meant a real sacrifice, it brought no appreciable increase to the treasury. Then in point of fact was it not wasted? That anybody would be brutal enough to sneer at her for coming with such a minute offering is scarcely to be imagined if her presumably obvious poverty were observed. Some would pity her for what they would consider to be her needless punctiliousness in bringing an offering at all from her extreme poverty, seeing that she could only give what was practically worthless. Such would be the world's view of the case. Such is too often the Church's view of similar cases, although care may be taken to keep up the stereotyped form — "The smallest contributions thankfully received."

In the eyes of our Lord the case is exactly reversed. The widow's two mites are more than the shekels and talents of the wealthy. Paradoxical as this would be to the people brought up in the externalism of the Pharisees' religion, for us who are familiar with the principles of Christ's teaching it is perfectly intelligible. The root of Christian ethics is inwardness of motive. With Christ the value of an action is determined by its aim. What I do is good in so far as I intend good; and it has worth in proportion to the moral effort it requires in my own soul. Therefore a small action may have a high value if it is the outcome of a great purpose, or if it involves a great sacrifice. All value is relative. Things are dear or cheap according to the standard with which we compare them. With our Lord the standard is internal. That "personal equation" which we so often forget to make, or over which we blunder so sadly, is all important in the true judgment of conduct, and with Jesus Christ as the Judge it cannot but be accurately worked.

That the widow gave more than all the rest simply means that what she gave was more of a sacrifice to her,

that judged by her means of giving it was a larger proportion. It was her all, her living. Nobody else had given his whole property, nobody else had sacrificed what was needed for his livelihoood. These rich donors had given out of their superfluity; the widow out of her deficiency. Their gifts, large as they were, absolutely involved no serious sacrifice; but her little gift was a real sacrifice, seeing that she had not enough to live on, and yet, though she was short to begin with, she still contrived to set aside something for the service of God.

Therefore a common modern application of the phrase, "the widow's mite," is quite inappropriate. The notion that a small gift under any circumstances may be gracefully apologised for by the giver calling it his "mite," ignores the chief point in the story of this widow at the temple. It was not because she gave a very small sum that she was commended, but because she gave her all, although in her particular case that happened to amount to no more than two farthings. He who would claim this woman's place of honour must do her generous deed, must give his all.

We shall not improve on the lessons of this story by any extravagant treatment of it. Thus it has been said that the widow was the more generous in giving as many as two mites, when she could have reduced her offering by half, dropping one of the coins in the treasury and retaining the other for her own use. But it was not allowable for anybody to give less than two mites. The fact is, she gave the very least that it was lawful for her to give.

Then it is not reasonable to go beyond our Lord's words, and represent this woman's gift as the greatest possible gift in the estimation of Jesus, or the greatest gift that has ever been given. He says nothing of the kind. It is a common mistake to translate everything in the Bible into superlatives; to paint every good man as an angel, every bad man as a fiend; to make out every action to be either

absolutely sublime or absolutely vile. Nothing more tends to make the Bible appear to be an unreal book. In the present instance it is to be observed that our Lord uses the comparative mood—not the superlative; or if it be said that "more than all" is virtually superlative, still it must be remembered that the "all" does not comprehend the universe. Comparing the widow with the rich contributors whom He watched bringing their ostentatious gifts, Jesus declared that she had exceeded them all. There was nobody else on this occasion who was giving his whole property, all he possessed. But it is not to be denied that greater sacrifices might be made or have been made.

The two mites would purchase but a single meal, and that of the most meagre character. If, therefore, the woman had spent them in this way, in a few hours she would have been in as needy a condition as she was after casting the coins into the treasury. But if a man of fortune gave all he possessed he would cripple his means for life. This woman was poor and almost destitute when she came to the temple, and her parting with these two small coins could not in any way affect her future condition in the world. But if a person in comfortable circumstances gave up the whole of his property, he would have to change his position in society and come down to the lowest. Of course that must mean a much greater sacrifice. Many of those who had lands and other possessions and sold them all, bringing the whole produce to the common fund that the apostles opened in the primitive church at Jerusalem, must have made a considerably greater sacrifice than was made by this widow. When St. Francis in his youth, with all the prospects of wealth before him, stripped himself of everything even to his very clothes, which he flung back to his angry father, his sacrifice must have been greater than that of the widow. Nor is there anything in this assertion contrary to the words of Jesus, or the lesson He

was teaching. Of all the rich men who were casting into the treasury at that time there was not one who made an offering the real worth of which was equal to what this woman gave. That is the exact case. That is all that Jesus said.

Hence we are led to another branch of our Lord's teaching. In the most emphatic terms He deplored the difficulty of rich men coming into the kingdom of heaven. It was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. The sacrifice for Christ is so much harder where there is so much more to be given up.

The converse must also be true. When the rich man does make the sacrifice, the value of his self-surrender is proportionately greater.

But when all this is said, and the case is viewed in its right proportions, the lessons it contains are sufficiently impressive.

Perhaps the first of them is not so much to draw admiration for the one giver commended as to bring shame to the many whose gifts she had exceeded in so simple a way. After all, she had not done so very much, at the most sacrificing her next meal. But they had done still less. Not one of them would go without his dinner because of the gift he was bringing for the temple-service. Probably the giver of the largest amount would go home to a very sumptuous meal. Not for one moment would he dream of lessening the lavish fare of his table by a single dish in order that he might be able to give the more to the service of God. It was very easy to surpass the whole of these rich givers; and that the widow had done with her mites. This is a lesson of shame and humiliation.

And it is a lesson that the servants of Christ are slow to learn. Almost every charitable society in Christendom sets the names of its munificent donors in places of honour, while the smaller givers must be content to remain in obscurity, an obscurity, however, of which the worthy among them will not complain.

Nothing can be more foreign to our Lord's teaching in this incident than the prevalent custom of printing the lists of contributors to any good object in the order of the amounts given, beginning with the thousands and the hundreds, and coming down to the tens and the units. The widow never appears in these lists. Her mites are ignominiously lumped together with other people's mites in an odd figure, under the title "smaller sums." The great donor is made a patron of the fund, a life-governor of the institution. The widow with her mites must be content to be ignored. This, we are told, is politic. Perhaps so; but will anybody say it is Christlike? Very likely it is found to be the easiest method of raising the large sums that are required. But this only is another way of saying that the whole question of religious finance rests on a low basis. If the mind of Christ dwelt in the givers no such worldly devices would need to be thought of. Probably in the case of most of these funds the person who really deserves most honour as having made the largest sacrifice is neither the great man whose name appears at the top for the largest amount, but who has given out of his superfluity; nor the obscure man whose name is relegated to the bottom for the smallest gift, and who may perhaps be doing less than he ought; but the humble person whose name is buried in the middle of the column, who has made some serious effort in order to bring his gift up to the utmost that he has been able to make it. No gift counts for anything if it does not require sacrifice. That is the essential point. And where the sacrifice is greatest there the gift is greatest.

But now let us return to the woman whose deed of generosity, slight as it appeared in itself, attracted so marked attention from our Lord. We are to beware of unreasonable extravagance. Still her conduct called forth the admiration of Jesus. It was the one act in all that scene of lavish giving that He cared for at all. It was beautiful. It did involve a sacrifice. But she who made

this sacrifice could cast herself on the goodness of God for whom she brought the gift. Any mercenary motive resting on the belief that God would surely provide at least as much even in money as she gave would have spoilt the gift. She must give with the brave consciousness that the consequence might be the necessity for her to go hungry. She could not be sure that it would be the will of God to spare her suffering. But if she had faith she would know that even that must be well when it was His will. At all events she would leave all to Him.

Meanwhile it is her joy to take her part in the temple offerings. She could easily have found an excuse in her extreme penury. She might have been deterred from very shame of giving so little. A cold, commonsense calculation might have suggested that her minute contribution among so many large amounts was of no practical use. None of these thoughts deter her. She will do her best.

The effect of such giving to the woman herself must have been very happy. At once it lifted her out of the sordidness of poverty. One of the worst effects of extreme penury is the engrossing attention it seems to demand to the mere scraping together of the barest subsistence. This must have a narrowing effect on the mind. In His parable of the Sower, Jesus Christ points to the cares of life as well as the deceitfulness of riches as hindering the growth of the good seed. So in His lesson on the birds and the lilies He warns His disciples not to be anxious for the morrow in order that they may be free to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. But how is it possible not to be anxious for the morrow when a man is at his wits' end to know where to-morrow's dinner is to be got? If it is most hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven, next to his difficulty must be that of a very poor man. Both have this in common, that they are in danger of their attention being chained to the things of

earth, the one in the idolatry of wealth, the other in the anxiety of poverty.

It has been said that there is a certain freedom in precariousness, that if you can never provide for more than a day or so in advance, you have no occasion for looking forward beyond such a short period. This may be the case with a happy-go-lucky person who has cast care to the winds as too uncomfortable a companion. But there are men who do not find it easy to take life in this jaunty fashion. For such it must be a serious strain to be always living from hand to mouth, always on the verge of starvation, never reasonably assured of to-morrow's livelihood; and it is piteous to see that according to Mr. Charles Booth's statistics one-tenth of the population of London exists habitually in this miserable condition.

But now when a person in the sadly crowded class of the extremely poor actually summons courage to make a *gift*, to take her share in supporting the work of religion, she is indulging in a real luxury. It is only to a noble soul that a gift offered under such circumstances would be a delight. But only a noble soul can be imagined as making such an offering. When the widow has the spirit to do this deed she at once rises out of the gloomy monotony of her penury, set free from the hard bondage of care, lifted into the cheerful atmosphere of generosity, saved therefore from the most dreary consequence of poverty, its sordid living.

In this respect the widow at the temple becomes a cheering example for poor people of generous dispositions, whose peculiar trial it is that when they would so gladly assist the cause of Christ—support much needed schemes for the betterment of mankind, or share in the work of extending missionary work—they think it is impossible for them to do so. Their narrow means are barely sufficient for the support of their own families; what margin can they have for giving? Still harder is the lot of one who

like this widow is apparently left alone in the world, and yet has not sufficient for the supply of her own wants. She has not even the satisfaction of feeling that her struggle with poverty is for the support of a family that is dependent on her. It is wholly for herself. But now we have the encouragement of Christ for the very poor. It may be that the opportunity can rarely come to them. But when it does come it is exceedingly precious to such as have the mind of Christ. If people who despair of doing anything because they cannot do much would emulate the courageous widow with her mites, many a dingy life would be lit up with a new and exalting interest, and many a good cause would be lifted into a purer and more Christ-like atmosphere.

CHAPTER XV

Mary Magdalene—Adoration after Deliverance

NO character of history has been more grievously misrepresented by legend than that of Mary Magdalene. Traditionally treated as the typical penitent weeping for her sins, the Magdalen has given her name to institutions for the recovery of her lost sisters with whose shame there is no reason whatever for associating her character. The unhappy misrepresentation has arisen from a double confusion. First, the "woman that was a sinner" who anointed the feet of Jesus in the Galilean Pharisee's house is unwarrantably identified with Mary of Bethany; then the two are equally without reason identified with the Mary out of whom Jesus cast seven devils. Each of these stages is reached by a leap of imagination, not by a step on the solid ground of argument.

In the first place we have the identification of the "woman that was a sinner" with Mary of Bethany. No doubt there is a certain similarity in the accounts of the anointing ascribed to these two women. They both bring ointment in an alabaster cruse; in both cases the name of the proprietor of the house where the anointing takes place is Simon. On both occasions the anointment is poured upon Jesus; in both cases the spectators object to the act of homage.

But these are all very superficial resemblances. Alabaster was commonly used in the making of small vessels. Anointing was quite customary—Simon was deficient in hospitality because he neglected it, and the preference of ointment to oil in both cases would simply indicate the more sumptuous rendering of the service. Simon was one of the commonest

names among the Jews in the time of Christ. As many as twelve Simons are mentioned in the New Testament.

On the other hand the points of difference are many and serious. *Luke's* anointing by the "woman that was a sinner" is placed in Galilee some time before the end of our Lord's ministry; Simon is present as host and he is described as a Pharisee; while the name of the woman who brings the ointment is not given, she is described as "a sinner"; she weeps over the feet of Jesus and wipes them with her hair; it is His feet that she anoints; the complaint is made by the host, and the ground of it is the character of the person from whom Jesus receives this attention; our Lord's reply treats of the forgiveness of sins and its consequences, which He illustrates in a parable. Now look at the very different circumstances in the other case. It is at Bethany, in the last week of our Lord's ministry; the name of the woman is given as Mary, no word is said against her character, and she is identified as the sister of Martha who is serving at the feast, so that she has a right to be present; the Simon to whom the house belongs is a leper, and there is no hint that he is at the feast; the ointment is described as exceptionally precious; Mary pours her ointment over the head of Jesus, *i.e.* according to the synoptic account—*John* has "feet"; the complaint is made by the disciples, or one of them; the ground of it is the waste of the money spent in the costly ointment; in defending His friend Jesus meets this complaint by accepting the offering as for His burial.

With so many and so great divergencies to face, the only way in which we could accept the identification of the two accounts of the anointing would be to follow Schleiermacher in his critical treatment of *Luke* and allow that the narratives differ, because St. Luke's is inaccurate. But if that be the case his authority falls to the ground, and we have no reason to apply what he says about the character of the woman in his narrative to Mary of Bethany. A much

simpler explanation of the divergencies is to admit that they refer to different events.

In the second place there is the identification of Mary of Bethany with the Magdalen. The first step in this identification is the assumption that the two anointings were but one, or at least were both performed by the same person. Thus the name Mary comes to be transferred to the "woman that was a sinner." The Magdalen is also named Mary; she had experienced a great deliverance—for out of her there had been cast seven devils, and in consequence she had become one of the most enthusiastic disciples of Jesus. The first step goes with the separation of the anointings. We have no reason to conclude that the penitent was named Mary. Demoniacal possession as it appears in the Gospels is marked by the symptoms of brain and nervous diseases, insanity and epilepsy, and these only. It is always kept distinct from what we may regard as the diabolical possession of a soul that is abandoned to moral evil.

This double misunderstanding was not known in the early church. It crept in with St. Ambrose in the fourth century, found some favour with St. Augustine, and was fully proclaimed by Pope Gregory two hundred years later. On the authority of Gregory it came to be universally accepted, and thenceforth it was taken for granted throughout the middle ages. Thus it was adopted by the great schools of art that grew up in this period; and then in turn the painters further popularised it. A late and quite unhistorical legend sends the Bethany household to sea in a rotten boat at the hands of cruel persecutors. They are miraculously preserved and land near Marseilles, where Martha makes many converts and works many miracles, while her sister Mary Magdalene retires to a cave near Arles and spends the remainder of her days in penitence. It is but one stage further in this region of baseless invention to go with the Talmudists who identify Mary the mother of Jesus with the Magdalen, by a strange perversion

of the surname, though derived from a possible interpretation of it, giving out that she was a woman hairdresser.

From these wild and foolish stories let us turn to the true Mary Magdalene of the Gospels. There is some doubt as to the meaning of her surname. One explanation of it is to derive it from the Hebrew *Gadal*, which means to plait, so as to get the meaning "hair-plaiter." Hence we have "Miriam with the braided locks." Even this is distorted into a sign of female vanity, and as pointing to a person of light character. In Christian art the Magdalen appears with long hair—no doubt with a reference to the incident in Simon the Pharisee's house. But a more probable explanation of the name is that which derives it from the town of Magdala on the west shore of the sea of Galilee, a few miles south of the plain of Gennesareth. Thus she is Mary of Magdala.

There is reason to suppose that Mary Magdalene was in less humble circumstances than most of our Lord's disciples. Not only is she one of those who maintain the common purse which meets the wants of Jesus and the twelve, but she assumes a certain prominence in the narrative especially towards the end, indicating a place of distinction among the ministering women.

If this surmise is correct, then the contrast between her outward rank and her terrible affliction must have been peculiarly painful. She is introduced by St. Luke, the physician, as "Mary that was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out."[1] Her case must have been one of peculiar severity. A similar aggravation of possession is described in the parable of the man who is like a house swept and garnished and empty till the demon who has been dispossessed returns with *seven* companions worse than himself,[2] and in the narrative of the fierce demoniac among the tombs of Gadara who names himself "Legion," after the idea of his multitudinous possession.

[1] *Luke* viii. 2.

[2] *Matt.* xii. 43–45.

Whatever this fearful calamity might be, these cases must be reckoned as among its most severe manifestations. Such was the mournful condition of Mary Magdalene.

A large part of the healing work of Christ and His apostles was directed to the deliverance of persons who were said to be possessed by demons. Evidently a great number were held to be suffering from this affliction in the time of our Lord. Nor was this class of sufferers confined to that period. References to them are common in early church history, in Jewish legends and Talmudic writings, and also in pagan literature, though not so frequently as among Christian and Jewish authors. From this widespread evidence it would appear that the centuries about the time of the rise of Christianity were oppressed with a vast terror of demoniacal possession. No greater service could be rendered to society in those days than to cast out demons. The early church had a special order of exorcists entirely devoted to that function.

Now it would be easy to assert that all this is nothing but a monstrous superstition. It has been pointed out that there is little or nothing in the phenomena of possession that does not occur in well-known brain and nerve diseases, with perhaps the addition of hypnotism and thought-transference, in a few cases. That may be said to be the modern medical view of the accounts that have come down to us. If we admit it we do not deny the misery of the afflicted persons who certainly thought themselves to be possessed, and we must still perceive the greatness of the works of healing performed by Jesus Christ and by His disciples on the strength of His name. For the sufferers were cured. Mary Magdalene was delivered, whatever may be the scientific account of her affliction, and the greatness of the deliverance redounded to the glory of the Deliverer.

Further, it is not at all unreasonable to allow that Jesus would have effected these cures on the lines of the pre-

valent belief. This would be the best way of approaching the sufferers, since they were firmly convinced that they were actually inhabited and controlled by evil spirits with a personality distinct from their own. Besides, it was not the mission of Jesus Christ to anticipate the pathological discoveries of the nineteenth century any more than it was His mission to reveal the truths of modern astronomy and geology. He moved in the atmosphere of His time. If He had not done so He could not have been the Son of Man for His own age as well as for the future. He could not have been understood, and He would have been regarded as quite out of sympathy with His contemporaries. Whatever may be our modern notions about the symptoms which were formerly regarded as signs of demoniacal possession, the only possibility in the time of Christ was that they should be spoken of and treated according to the universal belief about them.

Still let us beware of dogmatism. The dogmatism of religion is outworn; what we are now subject to is the dogmatism of science. The latest results of science are pressed upon us as absolute verities. But consider this very significant fact. No work of science that is ten years old is held to be valid. Science is perpetually superseding science. Then how can we believe that the latest of its wave-marks will not be washed out by a still higher tide, as was the case with all preceding ones? The advance of science is simply magnificent, but it is advance in a line the end of which we do not yet see, and meanwhile, like the mythological Saturn, science is perpetually devouring its own children.

Can we be so sure that there is no dark spiritual secret behind the phenomena which our medical men now ascribe to nerve and brain disorders. The whole subject is exceedingly obscure, as the doctors themselves admit. Perhaps we shall be told some day that later discoveries are bringing us back to beliefs which a crude half-science had

abandoned too hastily. This is not a subject for scorn and arrogance. The mystery of it is too great.

And now, however we may account for the terrible trouble with which Mary Magdalene had been afflicted, when she first appears in the gospel story she is in her right mind and found among the most devoted women who give their property and much of their time for the service of Jesus Christ. She travels with the little band of ministering women. And all the while the memory of that dark and dreadful past is with her—not as a cloud and a terror—she is too completely emancipated—but rather as an inspiration of never-failing gratitude.

And yet we must not think of Mary as simply indulging in emotionalism. With her deep feelings she is also a woman of action. First she joins the band of ministering women. Possibly of ampler means than the majority of them, she becomes the chief support of the travelling company. The other women gather round her as a person of some position, and the fascination of her character does more to secure her a prominent place among them than her mere superiority in social position. But common devotion to Jesus unites the sisterhood as one family, from Joanna the court lady to Salome the fisherman's wife; and if the Magdalen has wealth that some do not possess, she does not dream of joining herself especially to Joanna, patronising the humbler women. It is a united band of loyal disciples.

In the company of these attendant women Mary Magdalene travels up to Jerusalem on that last dread journey, which, Jesus had told them, was to His death. She is of the group of those who stand afar off watching the crucifixion. In every list of these women given by the synoptic evangelists her name comes first.[1] It would seem, therefore,

[1] *Matt.* xxvii. 56; *Mark* xv. 40; *Luke* xxiii. 55 compared with xxiv. 10. In *John*, however, the mother of Jesus stands first and the Magdalen last (xix. 25).

that here also Mary Magdalene may have taken the lead among the women. Perhaps it was her devotion that encouraged the others to be present at the execution, though womanly instinct would naturally shrink from the appalling spectacle. A fearful fascination draws the Magdalen to the fatal spot, and she brings her companions with her. There is nothing to be done. But if their presence were perceived by the sufferer it would afford that solace of sympathy for which His soul had more than once craved in vain. We cannot quite bring the various accounts into agreement on this point. The Synoptics place the women "afar off"; St. John at the foot of the cross. His mother must have been close at hand when Jesus committed her to the charge of the beloved disciple. We shall never be able to settle some of these minor details. But of course it is quite possible that both accounts are correct; that the women were first at a distance, and then as the darkness gathered and the agony grew more intense, crept up closer till they actually found themselves among the soldiers near the foot of the cross.

It is not the custom of the evangelists to describe the feelings of the various personages of their narratives, and in this case, as usual, they content themselves with a bare recital of the facts, leaving all else to conjecture. That those six hours of mortal agony on the cross must have rent the soul of a woman of Mary's excitable nature goes without saying. One consequence that might have been feared did not ensue. We might have supposed that so severe a strain would have occasioned a return of Mary's dreadful malady; it was enough to have unhinged the reason of a person who had not passed through her sad experience. But nothing of the kind occurred. The cure had been perfectly effective, and its results were permanent and capable of withstanding the greatest shock. So Mary was able to watch the last moments and hear the awful cry with which the spirit of her Lord took its flight, and remain herself.

After this she took her share with the other women in preparing the spices for the entombment. With her companions in grief she rested through that most mournful Sabbath the world has ever known, the Sabbath that knew only a dead Christ. For Mary the tension of waiting in the depths of despair must have been exceptionably trying. Yet she lived through this also, and still retained her reason.

At length the dreary Sabbath has dragged out its course, the following night is over—the most eventful night in the history of the world, though as yet nobody knows of its great event. And now at length it is possible to set out for the tomb with the spices that are to be used in the last ministry of love. Here again we meet with some difficulty in fitting together the several accounts of the evangelists. Was the sun already risen when the women reached the tomb, as St. Mark asserts?[1] Or was it still dark, as St. John says?[2] Or do the synoptic accounts and that of the fourth gospel refer to different events? They are very different in their further details. In the Synoptics Mary Magdalene comes with the other women; in the fourth gospel she is alone.

St. John's account is very full and explicit, and it is with this that we have to do now. Possibly, as has been suggested, though the women set out together, the Magdalen in her eagerness outran the other women, reaching the garden while it was still dark, and having then her own private sight of the empty tomb; after which she may have gone back another way in search of Peter and John, so that she was not met by the women whom she had left on the road earlier. Thus when they came to the tomb, later in the morning after the sun was up, they were still in ignorance of what had happened, and amazed at discovering that the stone had been rolled away. Then after their departure Mary may have returned with the

[1] *Mark* xvi. 2. [2] *John* xx. 1.

two disciples. This seems to be the simplest reconciliation of the divergent accounts, though it must be admitted that it does not entirely clear up the difficulties. The Synoptics drop no hint as to the division of the party; but then they may not have known of it. St. John gives us no idea that Mary was accompanied by other women when she set out from the city; but then while he knew these earlier gospels, his sole purpose was to supply his own special information. We cannot understand how the women would have been so long on the road, that though Mary was able to reach the tomb while it was yet dark, they did not arrive till after sunrise. Some of them may have gone for more spices on the way; and we must remember that the dawn and twilight in more southern latitudes are shorter than with us. Still we need not concern ourselves with these small details. We can allow of the discrepancies and yet retain all that is essential to the narrative; and it is wiser to do so than to throw the whole into a haze of uncertainty by straining at forced explanations.

Our business now is to follow the course of Mary Magdalene. It is St. John, as we have seen, who gives us the account of her adventure. First she was distressed at finding the tomb empty. In regard to that important fact, it is to be remarked in passing, all the four evangelists are unanimous. Mary at once concludes that somebody must have rifled the tomb and stolen her Lord's body. Who the body-snatcher might be she cannot guess, nor can she have any notion as to the motive for this sacrilege. It might have been the work of some peculiarly malignant enemy bent on distressing the Galileans, by depriving them of the comfort of performing the last offices for the dead. Mary cannot stay to think now. The news is too momentous to be kept a secret; and the startled woman runs back at once to tell the two principal disciples. It would seem that she had to look them up in separate places, the language of the evangelist suggesting that she went first

to St. Peter and then to "the other disciple."[1] To both her message was the same: "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we know not where they have laid Him." That word "we" rather than "I" may imply that after all Mary had been accompanied by the other women at this first visit to the tomb. Else why did she use the plural pronoun? But we cannot clear up this point. Mary's news was alarming, and the two disciples ran off at once to ascertain the facts for themselves. She also returned, and after the two had visited the tomb and gone away, awed and perplexed at what they had seen, Mary still stood there weeping. She could not tear herself away. Bewildered, distressed, despairing, there was nothing for her to do but weep; there was nowhere for her to go, for no place had any comfort. The barbarism of this supposed outrage would be most terrible; but it is not that so much as the fact of the loss of the body that most troubles Mary.

Presently, still weeping, Mary stoops and looks into the tomb. Is it just possible that she has been mistaken before in the darkness, and that the dear body is still peaceably resting on its last bed, that cold, hard bed of rock? She is amazed at the sight of what she had not discovered in the shock of disappointment that came to her on the occasion of her first visit. Then she had only observed the one supreme fact that Jesus was not in the tomb. Now she sees two angels in white, one sitting at the head, the other at the foot of the grave. The statement that they are in white seems to imply that visions of angels did not generally assume this guise; and most descriptions of angel visits given in the Bible suggest that the appearance was very like that of men in their ordinary attire. But this is exceptional. And yet Mary does not seem to be very much startled. She does not behave in the least like the other women when they saw the young

[1] Suggested by the repetition of the preposition πρός in *John* xx 2.

man sitting in the tomb, and fled in terror. She is too dazed to be capable of further astonishment, too overwhelmed with sorrow to have anything worse to fear.

The angels are comforters. They ask her why she weeps. It is because her Lord has been taken away, and she knows not where they have laid Him. Then she turns. Did she hear a sound? Or was she moved by that vague, undefinable sense that somebody is near, although as yet no sign of His presence has been given? There is some one; and as soon as she sees Him He speaks to her, repeating the angels' question—Why is she weeping? and then adding the further question, Whom is she seeking?

We cannot tell why Mary did not at once see that it was Jesus who was speaking to her. And yet her want of perception is not so very mysterious. She was not in the mood to notice anybody through the veil of her tears. When the soul is absorbed with its own internal feeling of sorrow the faculties of observation are not very keen. And Jesus alive was the very last person Mary expected to see when she was engaged in the search for His dead body. She took the Speaker for the gardener, the most likely person to be found in this private enclosure so early in the day. When Jesus was crucified He was stripped of His clothes, the Romans allowing no clothing to the victim of the cross except the loin-cloth—the *subligatulum.* But this was all that labourers wore at their work in the hot climate of Palestine. If Jesus had appeared just as He would have been after leaving the burial bandages behind in the tomb, He would have looked like a man prepared for his work. But this was very different from His appearance with tunic and cloak as Mary had been accustomed to see Him in the old days. It was quite natural, therefore, that in her present distracted condition of mind, not looking up to the face of the Speaker, Mary should take Him for the gardener whom in outward appearance He resembled.

Mary catches at a sudden suggestion. Perhaps it was this gardener who had removed the body. If so would he tell her where he had conveyed it, that she might go and fetch it away? It is amazing that an imaginative French critic should have contrived to found on this simple remark a theory that Mary actually had carried the body of Jesus in her own arms out of the tomb in order to occasion the belief that He had risen. As if it could have been possible for a woman to perform such a feat. And then how could she have disposed of the corpse? This strange attempt to resolve the foundation of the Christian belief in the resurrection into a piece of fraud perpetrated by a hysterical woman is only worth mentioning to illustrate the difficulty of explaining the narratives of that event on any other hypothesis than the simple one that it really did occur. Of course Mary could talk of fetching the body if she meant having it conveyed. But we must not weigh the words of passionate grief too exactly.

A word is enough to open her eyes. "Mary!" It is her own name in the old tone. With a flash of consciousness she suddenly perceives the amazing truth. "My Master!" she answers, and is about to fling herself on Him in the enthusiasm of her joy.

"Touch Me not," He says, "for I am not yet ascended unto the Father"—a strange repulse that has given rise to not a few fantastic conjectures, as that Jesus still felt the pain of His wounds, or that the process of transformation from the natural body to the spiritual not yet being completed He shrank from contact in the transitional condition. A simple explanation is to translate the Greek *haptou* that we have rendered "touch" by the English word "hold." There is no occasion for holding Jesus in order not to lose Him, because the ascension is not yet. But though this meaning of the word is met with frequently in literature it is not common in the New Testament. Indeed it cannot be proved to have ever occurred there. Another inter-

pretation is, "Do not cling to Me; but go and tell the good news of My resurrection to the others." This is suggested by the conclusion of our Lord's words, in which He lays the command on Mary. But it is open to the same objection—namely, that it requires a meaning of the Greek word that is doubtfully if ever found in the New Testament. Following the common New Testament meaning we must retain the idea of *Noli me tangere.* How this is to be understood we cannot quite say. Perhaps out of the many offered explanations the best is that which points to the most intimate fellowship with Christ as only possible after the resurrection. In the wild excitement of her joy at the recovery of her Lord this passionate woman would embrace Him as she had never dared to do during His earthly life. He draws aside. Not yet. But when He is ascended, when He has passed into the spiritual world, when He is completely with His Father, then the most absolutely unfettered communion will be possible. Thus His ascension, instead of being a departure, is really a drawing near to His people. It is a passing into that unseen but spiritual world where the closest contact is always possible. With this assurance Mary must be content, and live in hope as she goes forth with the joyous news she is commissioned to carry to the disciples whom her Lord now calls His brethren.

CHAPTER XVI

Dorcas and Phœbe—Woman's Work

WOMAN'S work in the Church is no novelty invented by this ingenious, innovating nineteenth century. It has been seen in various forms during all ages of Christendom, and it may be traced back to noble precedents in New Testament times. Nearly every woman among the early disciples mentioned in the *Gospels*, the *Acts*, and the *Epistles* is associated with some form of Christian service. The primitive churches were hives of industry, and the work carried on in them was largely of such a character that women could take a prominent place in it. For the most part this consisted in acts of charity done for the benefit of poor and suffering members of the community.

We saw in the case of those who supplied the material wants of our Lord and the twelve that several women of means had been won to the faith. The same fact is apparent in Apostolic times. Dorcas and Phœbe, though not in any way associated together—the one was a Jewess of Palestine in the sphere of St. Peter's ministry, the other a European Greek lady known to St. Paul—were both of them in circumstances that afforded opportunities for wide influence, and they both used their influence in aiding their fellow-Christians.

1. *Dorcas.*—The name "Dorcas,"[1] so familiar to us through those very useful societies in our modern churches which bear it to-day, is only the Greek translation of the Aramaic "Tabitha," which was the actual name of the

[1] *Acts* ix. 36–43.

woman disciple at Joppa, whose story is narrated in the *Acts of the Apostles.* The Septuagint translates the Hebrew equivalent wherever it occurs in the Old Testament as a common noun meaning "gazelle" by the same Greek word. Still Dorcas is the familiar name to us of the Western Church, and with that name the story must always be associated.

It was at Joppa, the modern *Jaffa*, the port for Jerusalem, where Hiram's cedar for the temple, felled in the forest of Lebanon up in the north, and floated down the coast of the Levant from Tyre, had been landed in the days of Solomon; and where the disobedient prophet Jonah had taken ship for Tarshish. A Christian community had been formed in this busy seaport, no doubt after the pattern of the mother church at Jerusalem. In both places St. James's ideal of "pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father" was aimed at, viz., "to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."[1] Mary the mother of Mark seems to have been a sort of patroness of the Church at Jerusalem. At all events, the brethren used to meet for prayer at her house.[2] Dorcas appears to have been a woman of good social position at Joppa; but her service was rendered in the old-fashioned forms of almsgiving and the work of her needle. She is the type of the homeliest, simplest, and yet most directly practical form of woman's work.

We should do injustice to womankind in general, and to the women of the old Jewish Church in particular, if we took it for granted that the charities which blossomed in the life of such a saint as Dorcas were entirely new flowers of grace quite unknown to the world before the time of Christianity. The woman's heart must often have prompted the doing of kind deeds to the needy. We may be permitted to suppose that the model housewife Penelope, spinning among her women while her husband Ulysses is

[1] *James* i. 27. [2] *Acts* xii. 12.

on his travels, would find some garment to spare for the poor swineherd's widow. Almsgiving, we know, was about the principal duty of the pious Jew in the time of our Lord. It takes a prominent place as a manifestation of righteousness in the so-called "Psalms of Solomon," a Pharisaic work of the times just before the advent of Christianity. In His directions about almsgiving, with their warning against display, Jesus assumes that the service will be rendered, and describes the ostentatious manner of the Pharisees in performing it.[1] The Jews of our own day are very careful to provide for their own poor, and the munificence of wealthy Jews for the benefit of the people generally, including the Gentile population, is one of the conspicuous facts in connection with our modern charities. The churches at Jerusalem and Joppa consisted wholly of Jews; and their Judaism as well as their Christianity would prompt to almsgiving.

Still, while we make full allowance for these facts, not in any degree attempting to minimise them in order to exalt Christianity, but rather honouring them most ungrudgingly, we may go on and observe how much the gospel of Jesus Christ deepens and quickens the motive for charity. If so much kindness is seen in the world and in Judaism, how much more should be found in the church of which brotherly love growing out of the love of God in Christ is to be the characteristic note! Now here we see how Christ's rebuke to anxiety is based on reasonable grounds. When He bids us not be anxious for the morrow, because if God feeds the ravens and clothes the lilies with beauty, much more will He provide for His own children, the prudent soul is tempted to exclaim, "This is very beautiful, but is it practical?" But if we will only follow it out to its ultimate issues, we shall see that the teaching of Jesus is not unpractical. God provides for most of His children by giving them the means of earning their own livelihood;

[1] *Matt.* vi. 2–4.

for the unfortunate who have fallen out of the ranks of labour, the needy and helpless, He provides by inspiring sympathy and love in the hearts of their brethren. The 9th of *Acts* is the correlative of the 12th of *Luke*. The teaching of Jesus is reasonable because the spirit of Jesus raises up a Dorcas. In a rightly organised Christian church it is impossible for any of the members to perish of hunger and cold. This care for the poor and suffering is the first of Christian duties. The community that could neglect it would prove itself not to be Christian, to be below the Jew, to be scarcely human.

But the special charm of Dorcas's charities is in the fact that she worked for the poor with her own hands. She is celebrated for her "good works" as well as her "almsdeeds." If the latter means her gifts the former would point to her personal actions. It is something that people in affluent circumstances give from their abundance for the assistance of their less fortunate brethren. In this way they escape the terrible condition of a Dives who can permit Lazarus to die at his gate while he clothes himself in purple and fine linen and fares sumptuously every day. And it is more to make some real sacrifice like that of the wealthier members of the Jerusalem Church, who sold their possessions and laid the money at the apostles' feet. But the perfection of the service of love is not reached in merely giving, however great the gift may be, and however severe a sacrifice it involves. There is a peculiar grace in undertaking some form of active service —in doing as well as giving. It is well that a Peabody should give his money for the poor of London; it is better that a Shaftesbury should devote time and labour to philanthropic ends. We admire Barnabas for selling his estate; but more for being a son of consolation. The best thing in St. Francis is not that he stripped himself naked and gave up all his property; but the sequel to this when he set forth on his pilgrimage through the world for the benefit

of his fellow-men. We honour the great givers; the great workers are worthy of higher honour. Let us remember that Jesus did not content Himself with *giving* His grace, that He also "went about *doing* good."

Then further it is not without significance that the service rendered by Dorcas was in the form of the good old-fashioned work of the needle. What a picture that is —the widows standing weeping round the bier of the dead woman, holding up the coats and garments that she had made! These are the memorials of her gracious spirit, the certificates of her Christian character. Epitaphs may lie, but deeds speak truly, and theirs is a better sign of the worth of the departed than the most adulatory sentence engraved on a tombstone. And then those deeds of Dorcas were so simple, and the products of them so homely—an old widow's woollen cloak, a little orphan's jacket. But the sight of the garments brings tears to the eyes. It is as touching as that of the warrior's shield and sword laid by his side while he is being borne to the grave, or the trophies he won in battle hung up in a temple. Simple and homely as these things are they speak eloquently to the eye that knows how to read them—"See this garment. It was for a very poor woman. Yet how carefully it is sewn! What loving labour it represents! With her own hands good Dorcas had arranged this well-adjusted coat. These stitches were put in by her own fingers. Examine them. How exact they are! There was no haste about this work, no impatience in the execution of it. And it is all a work of love for the needy."

There is some danger lest in these more elaborately civilised days we should lose sight of the peculiar worth of woman's work with the needle. Much that was once a part of feminine handicraft is now done by machinery, the spinning-jenny taking the place of the distaff and the old-fashioned spinning-wheel, the steam factory and its power-looms superseding hand-weaving, the sewing-machine in

the great clothier's factory setting aside the use of the needle in the home. We are proud of our scientific progress and the adaptations of invention that go with it. No doubt this is "good for trade," and therefore a commercial people, such as we are, must greatly benefit by it. It would not be possible for us to exist with our immense population crowded on these little islands without the use of these modern improvements. Mr. Ruskin's schemes for the encouragement of village industries and the restoration of skilled work of hand are most delightful; but they could never support the millions of Yorkshire and Lancashire.

Still we pay a price for our commercial prosperity. There was a richness in the industry of the model woman in King Lemuel's mother's description of her which we miss in the narrowing of industries to factory methods—

> "She layeth her hands to the distaff,
> And her hands hold the spindle.
> She spreadeth out her palm to the poor;
> Yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.
> She is not afraid of the snow for her household;
> For all her household are clothed with scarlet.
> She maketh for herself carpets of tapestry;
> Her clothing is fine linen and purple."[1]

The very act of plying the needle has a quiet and soothing influence that must be missed in the substitution of factory work. Even the domestic sewing-machine dispels this charm. The strain of attention, the energy expended, the noise of the process—the whirr of wheels and rattle of treadles—all this is very different from the calmness associated with needle-work, that most ancient feminine employment. In deft fingers the needle runs swiftly, but how silently! The busy sewer sits so still that the drowsy hum of the bees round her open window sounds quite loud; she moves so little that the birds lose their fear, and may even venture to alight on the sill. And all the

[1] *Prov.* xxxi. 19–22.

while she works she can think. There is the peculiar advantage of needle-work. The factory "hand" must concentrate her attention on the rushing movement of the machine she is watching. But the woman who is at work with her needle may give all requisite attention to her task and yet have thoughts to spare for other subjects. She has the advantage of leisure without the *ennui* of idleness; and if her mind is moving "in maiden meditation fancy-free" what lovely reveries may be hers! or if intent on graver topics in the mood of *Il Penseroso*, her sole companion "the cherub Contemplation," what an opportunity she enjoys for serious musing! All this is impossible with the more absorbing occupations of men. And there is another way in which the advantage goes to woman with her needle. It is possible for her to enjoy a social hour and yet not have to lay aside all the work of life while it lasts; for she can converse and sew at the same time. A man has no such privilege of combining industry with sociability.

Those simple associations of ladies which bear the name of "Dorcas" have their justification. It may be said that they should be superseded now that machinery has introduced more expeditious and economical processes for providing garments for the poor. But if the money for those garments were contributed and the articles purchased the object of the meetings would not be attained. A wise church will not quickly set aside any organisation that helps to maintain its social life, and the advantage of such meetings as these may be said to be threefold. First, they supply the wants of the needy. Second, they afford an opportunity for deeds of kindness in actual work with the hands, a most desirable form of assistance. Third, they develop and maintain the social life of the community. Here, too, is some justification for that most extravagant and positively wasteful device for raising money in support of churches and charities—the Bazaar. The money is

given twice over, first in buying things for sale, then in buying them back at the sale. The people who sell often see their goods sacrificed for less than the materials cost them, not to mention the fact that they have to submit to the uncomplimentary consideration that their time—the many hours spent on the work—counts for no value; and the people who buy carry off armfuls of goods they do not want wherewith to cumber their houses, for the sake of the good cause, or perhaps to comfort the disappointed stall-keepers. Still, a mistake as it is when regarded from the standpoint of the political economist, the institution has this one supreme advantage—it develops the family life of the Christian community that promotes it.

And now, if some impatient maiden trained in all the schooling of the day is tempted to despise her needle, let her pause and ask herself whether she may not be slighting one of her best friends. The humble task of darning which often falls to the daughter of the house, and so gives her an opportunity for employing her needle even in these days of machinery, need not be resented by the highly educated young women as unworthy of her culture. It may be that just such a simple occupation with freedom for quiet thinking is the very best thing for her soul-life. And meanwhile let her reflect that it is *work*, and partakes of the dignity of all true work; and that it is *service*, a form of ministry, and as such the counterpart of the employment of angels.

> "All service ranks the same with God;
> If now, as formerly He trod
> Paradise, His presence fills
> Our earth, each only as God wills
> Can work—God's puppets, best and worst,
> Are we; there is no last nor first"![1]

It was the abundance of her kindly works that gathered the widows round the body of Dorcas. She had won their

[1] Robert Browning, *Pippa Passes.*

hearts by her services, and her death had left a great void. In their distress the Christians at Joppa sent in haste across the plain of Sharon to St. Peter, who was then at Lydda. Obeying the summons he came in to see the moving spectacle of the widows displaying the garments Dorcas had made them. Then the great miracle of the raising of Dorcas follows as the crowning honour for such a beautiful life of long service. It may be said that it was the love she had inspired by her kind deeds that called her back to life.

2. *Phœbe.*[1]—In the 16th chapter of the *Epistle to the Romans*, St. Paul commends to his correspondents "Phœbe our sister, who is a servant of the church at Cenchreæ." We shall see later[2] that there are strong reasons for detaching this chapter from the epistle of which it appears as an integral portion in our Bibles, and taking it for a fragment of some other epistle, addressed in all probability to the church at Ephesus, but still written by St. Paul. Then perhaps we should say the object of it was to furnish Phœbe with an introduction to the Ephesians, so that it was one of those "letters of commendation," in use among the early Christians, to which the apostle refers on another occasion.[3]

Phœbe is setting forth on a journey with the full cognisance of the church of which she is a member, and hearing their recommendation, or more exactly St. Paul's. It looks as though this were more than a private undertaking. It would seem to have some connection with the churches and their work. And yet the bond of brotherhood and sisterhood in the primitive churches is so close, that the distinction between private and public almost disappears among them, as it does in the delightful intimacy of family life.

Cenchreæ was the port of Corinth, on the Saronic gulf, looking eastward towards Ephesus, and therefore the place through which all the traffic of the Achaian capital with

[1] *Rom.* xvi. 1, 2. [2] Chapter xvi. [3] 2 *Cor.* iii. 1.

Asia passed to and fro. Here St. Paul once tarried for a while when he had shorn his head according to Jewish custom, to mark the expiration of a vow.[1] The saints of Achaia, to whom he addressed the *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, in conjunction with the church in the capital, would include those of Cenchreæ, and therefore Phœbe.

Phœbe is first described as "our sister." Thus a member of the Christian community is designated in the affectionate simplicity of primitive times. In using the plural "our," the apostle may be including the two or three fellow-missionaries who accompanied him on his travels, or he may be writing in the name of the church at Corinth with the associated branch church at Cenchreæ.

Then Phœbe is called "a servant of the church that is at Cenchreæ," and the word translated "servant" is the Greek *diaconos*, from which our word "deacon" is derived. Hence it has been inferred that Phœbe was a deaconess. On the other hand we must not forget that the Greek word was used in a very general sense in early times, quite apart from official relations. It does not appear as the title of an official before the pastoral epistles—unless the case before us may be cited for that usage earlier. And further, it is not the feminine deaconess (*diaconissa*), but the masculine, which will serve for either sex, but still which seems to imply that it does not stand for a definite feminine office. If it must be assigned to some church function here we should conclude that this was one open to men and women alike. But nothing of the kind was known in the primitive church. By the time of the Pastoral Epistles the "widows" seem to have been organised into an order. Thus St. Paul writes, "Let none be enrolled as a widow under three-score year old," &c.;[2] and yet the limit of age points to eleemosynary purposes rather than to service. You would not require a woman to be old before electing her for some work in the church. Still

[1] *Acts* xviii. 18.

[2] 1 *Tim.* v. 9.

there must have been women to do certain things for their own sex, such as attending on them at their baptism. We are too much inclined to think these services were relegated to definitely appointed officials from the first. In the simple family life of the early church this would not be thought of. The ministry preceded the office; and later the office grew out of the ministry. In the primitive church much was made of service, little of office. Methods were free and elastic; fluidity had not yet been followed by crystallisation. Before long, we know, there was a definite order of deaconesses in the church. This was so in Bythinia at least, in the reign of Trajan; for Pliny writes that he obtained his information concerning the Christians by torturing "two hand-maidens" (*ancillæ*) whom the Christians calls "servants" (*ministræ*).[1] Notice the technical word *diaconissa* is not employed here. Later the so-called "Apostical Constitutions" refer to the deaconess who must be "a chaste virgin."[2] On the other hand, Tertullian writes of "widows" and "mothers" being in the order.[3] All this is much later and throws no light on the place of Phœbe in the church. But that she did in some very marked way serve her church as a whole, and did not simply minister in private charities like Dorcas, is plainly shown by the apostle's language. That is all we can say on the subject.

Further, St. Paul adds that she was a "succourer" of many, and also of himself; and the Greek word translated "succourer" is the feminine of one that stands for the Latin *patronus*, the "patron." Phœbe in the church was like a patron among his clients—so familiar to us from Horace. Then she must have been a lady of wealth and influence. Possibly the church met in her house; possibly she supported evangelists and helped to maintain the efficiency of the church and spread its influence. We may compare her with the Countess of Huntingdon in the

[1] *Epis.* x. 96. [2] *Apos. Const.* vi. 17. [3] *De Vel. Virg.* c. 90.

eighteenth century. The good which such a woman may do by the use of her wealth is incalculable.

But now we see that Phœbe is not content to give of her money for the relief of poor members of her church and the support of missionary work, including something for the maintenance of the apostle or perhaps his travelling expenses—for he sustained himself at Corinth by his tent-making; she is about to set forth on a journey to visit some other church, apparently in discharge of some important mission. A courageous, energetic, gifted woman, devoted to the service of the churches.

In Phœbe then we have an entirely different type of woman from what we saw in Dorcas. There was room for the quiet almsgiving and the simple service of the needle. But it would be a grievous mistake to suppose that woman's work must be confined to one limited sphere. To say that larger and more public service is unwomanly and unseemly is but to voice an unreasoning prejudice. In the present day the scope of woman's work is immensely enlarged. On the School Board and on the Board of Guardians women not only render good service, they do distinctly womanly work. There are some duties in connection with these offices which men are decidedly less fitted to discharge than women. And when it comes to the committee and even the public meeting, while many women will shrink from the details of business, and more from the ordeal of the platform, it is not to be ignored that some have a real call to serve in these prominent places which is confirmed by the manifest good they are doing there.

We must not let Dorcas and her old-fashioned ministry be overlooked among the more conspicuous new activities of our day. But honouring Dorcas and the service of the ancient times does not mean refusing honour to Phœbe and the larger ministry of the new age, which is not less truly also woman's work. These energetic and capable Phœbes are only too rare among us. They have a right to free opportunities for rendering their noble service.

CHAPTER XVII

St. Paul's Woman Converts—Saved to Serve

ST. PAUL'S directions about the position of women in the church, which we meet with in the *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, taken by themselves, have led to an unfair estimate of the apostle's treatment of woman. The history in the *Acts of the Apostles*, supplemented by allusions in the epistles, should make it beyond question that far from undervaluing woman St. Paul rejoiced to find some of his most enthusiastic converts and loyal supporters among the women of the cities he visited in his travels. We have no means of ascertaining what proportion of the members of the early churches consisted of women. But we know that the proportion among the proselytes from heathenism to the Jewish faith was very considerable. As a rule in our own day the women worshippers in most congregations outnumber the men. Whether this was the case in the primitive church or not we cannot say. But at all events it is clear that women were prominent among the first converts. It is frequently asserted that woman is more religious than man. When we think of religion in its widest relations, comprehending the deepest thoughts of the heart and the most far-reaching energies of service and sacrifice, perhaps the statement cannot be easily proved. But when it comes to receiving direct religious impressions and uniting in the worship and fellowship of church life, most important parts of religion, though not the whole of it, as some seem to think, it does appear that the palm must be given to woman. At all events women are among the most important of St. Paul's converts.

1. *Lydia of Thyatira.*[1]—Lydia has the honour of being the first known Christian in Europe. We have no knowledge of the origin of the church at Rome. Philippi was the city where St. Paul first planted a church in Europe, and the first member of that church was Lydia the dyer. She was not a European by birth. A native of the province in Asia Minor after which she was named, which from the days of Homer [2] was famous for its trade of dyeing, coming from the city of Thyatira, where, as we learn from inscriptions, there was a guild of dyers, she was probably connected with some business in that city and now represented it in the Roman colony at Philippi. There she had her own place of business, and its household of slaves and workwomen.

Lydia was a proselyte to Judaism. In her case as in others the law had been a schoolmaster to lead to Christ. Her zeal according to the light she had received prepared her for further light. Her heart was already sensitive to impulses from above before it was opened to receive the gospel. She was one of the "devout" from among whom so many of the early Christians were drawn, one of those who, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, received the benediction of which Jesus spoke in attaining at length to the new righteousness that He brought into the world.

It was at the place of prayer whither she had gone for worship that Lydia heard the good news. When the missionaries from Asia who had been mysteriously summoned over to Macedonia landed at the port of Neapolis, they at once proceeded to the city of Philippi, where on the Sabbath, according to his custom, St. Paul with his companion travellers made his way to the Jewish place of worship. There was no synagogue in this city, probably because the

[1] *Acts* xvi. 11–15.

[2] It is not Lydia, however, as commonly asserted in the *Commentaries*, but the adjoining province of Karia that Homer refers to for its dyeing, *Iliad*, iv. 141, 142. Still no doubt the trade was carried on throughout that region.

Jews were not numerous. In the absence of a synagogue it was customary to meet in some hall, or even in an enclosure open to the sky, which was called a *Proseuchè*, or place of prayer. The apostle found one of these meeting-houses outside the gate of the city. Perhaps it was not allowed within the city walls, or the Jews may have chosen the site as suitable for their ablutions; for it was by the side of the river.[1] Here, according to the free and open customs of the Jews in their public worship, when St. Paul as a visitor signified his wish to speak, he was courteously permitted to address the little assembly. The use of the Greek imperfect in reference to Lydia—meaning in effect "she was in the habit of hearing" him, would lead us to suppose that the apostle repeated his visits on several Sabbaths. And all this time the pious woman was drinking in his words with an open mind. That is her remarkable characteristic—an open mind. She was one whose "heart the Lord had opened." Let us remember that in Scripture the "heart" does not stand for the affections as with us, but represents the whole inner life, mental as well as moral. So many of the Jews were quite inaccessible because their minds were closed and sealed with prejudices, an obstinate bigotry barring the gates against the advent of new ideas. This defect is not peculiar to the Jews of Philippi. It is the common failing of mankind. Most people are totally inaccessible to the advent of new thoughts in religion. Some regard anything of the kind as dangerous heresy simply on the ground of its novelty, while others who do not go quite so far turn from it with unreasoning aversion. Lydia was of another order of mind. She had shown this earlier by abandoning the paganism of her fathers—perhaps some dark superstition attributed to her city of Thyatira as of "the woman Jezebel" in the apocalypse[2]—and accepting the more elevated faith of Israel. Now she is prepared to

[1] This must be the Gaggitas, as the better known Strymon commonly referred to is too far off.

[2] *Rev.* ii. 20.

go a step further. Thus in her openness of mind Lydia is able to be also progressive. This is the more noteworthy, because it is a common assertion that women are more conservative in their religious beliefs than men. It was not found to be so at Philippi.

We must not lose sight of St. Luke's striking statement that it was "the Lord" who had opened Lydia's heart. Even for this woman who has already ventured on one great breach with the past, it needs the power of God to prepare the way for the reception of the new revelation. It must ever be so. We are all blind till He teaches us to see. But we are not therefore to infer that the only difference between Lydia and those people who did not receive the gospel was that she was favoured by God in a way that was denied to them. We must still say that she was one who willingly yielded to the new ideas, only we must add that the strength and courage to yield came from that Divine aid which was given to her in her prayers. It is no accident that Lydia's heart was opened in the house of prayer, no accident that this gift was hers when she was in the spirit of worship. A frivolous Athenian spirit may welcome new ideas for the sake of change without the aid of any Divine grace for receiving them; but it is to the devout that the right understanding of fresh truth may be expected to come. The dead orthodoxy of a prayerless church is the most fatal obstruction to the development of spiritual knowledge. Lydia's prayers lead to Lydia's open heart. Thus the gates of Europe lift up that the King of glory may come in.

A century before the river flowing by the gate of Philippi had been reddened with the blood of Rome's last patriots, when first Cassius and then Brutus lost the two battles that bear the name of this city. Now this same stream has its share in the establishing of a greater realm in Europe than the empire of Augustus. Here Lydia was baptized, St. Paul's first convert in Europe, as he would say, "the

firstfruits of Europe." With her they also baptized her household — either her children, or the workers in her business, and perhaps her domestic servants. It was understood that the proselyte to Judaism took over his household with him. The same was sometimes done in the case of the earlier converts to Christianity. Thus the jailor of this same city of Philippi was baptized "with his household." In this way we have a beginning of that church which from his epistle written years later when a prisoner at Rome we learn was always one of the most loyal to St. Paul, perhaps of all his churches the one that was the most unfailing source of joy and comfort. Lydia took no unimportant place in this community. She was his first member, and her house became the home of the missionaries for the remainder of their stay in the city. This fact implies that she was a woman of means. It shows the completeness of her adhesion to the new religion. It indicates the generous practical character of her religion. The open heart reveals her receptivity; the open house her generosity.

2. *The Pythoness.*[1]—The famous prophetess at Delphi was not without humble imitators in these times of the break-down of the old religions and the uprising of all sorts of wild superstitions. A lunatic girl would then serve well for a band of strolling sorcerers who had bought her as a slave. The public would easily be deluded into the belief that her ravings were the effects of possession by a divinity. Passing through the streets of Philippi, St. Paul more than once met a poor girl in this condition with her keepers out for their performances. These men had circulated the belief that she was under the influence of no less a divinity than the great Apollo, the very god who was supposed to have inspired the oracle at Delphi. The Greeks would call him a *daimon.* But to Jews the greatest of these *daimones* was a veritable demon, an evil spirit. To them pagan inspiration was diabolical possession. The

[1] *Acts* xvi. 16-18.

case was peculiar in its claim to be related to an oracle, and in the use the girl's employers made of it. Still as regards her mental symptoms, St. Paul would recognise the well-known signs of the fearful "possession" that was so common in Palestine and apparently elsewhere also.

The sight of the new missionaries strangely affected this girl. Like the demoniac in the Capernaum synagogue who recognised the higher nature of Jesus Christ, she called after the missionaries declaring them to be "servants of the most high God," who proclaimed "a way of salvation." Possibly she had caught some fragments of the apostle's message. To her dark, bewildered mind it promised a way of deliverance; and the perception of this fact touched the heart of Paul.

Accordingly, following the example that had come down from Jesus Christ, the apostle exorcised the evil spirit. Again we are face to face with the question that met us in the case of Mary Magdalene. Whatever may be our idea as to the cause of the disorders of brain and nerves that the ancients ascribed to possession—whether we consider them to be purely pathological or allow room for mysterious spiritual influences—we must admit here, as in the previous case, that in the first century of the Christian era the only way of dealing with the facts was on the hypothesis of a real possession. Thus, assuming the presence of the evil spirit, St. Paul commands it to come out of the afflicted girl.

It was something about deliverance, salvation, that this girl had discerned in the stray words she had caught in passing the apostle and his companions. Now the gift was hers. At the name of Christ the terrible possession had left her, and she had become tame, and quiet, and natural. But to the populace this was the loss of her inspiration; and therefore to her masters it was the loss of their trade. In a fury of rage these men dragged the new teachers into the forum and charged them with caus-

ing a disturbance and teaching unlawful doctrines. Thus in a very unusual way the cure of this poor girl brought a persecution on the apostles. As a rule it was the Jews who instigated the persecution of the Christian teachers, while the pagan population was indifferent, and the government officials were more or less friendly, or at least ready to protect peaceable men from the fury of fanaticism. The imprisonment of Paul and Silas at Philippi, contrary to the usual course of things, was of Pagan origin.

Nothing further is narrated of the girl. Most likely her masters gave her up in disgust when they discovered that she was no longer of any use to them. We may imagine that she became one of the early members of that happy church at Philippi, which we seem to know so well from the epistle directed to it. In passing from this story it may be interesting to note that while the first of St. Paul's converts in Europe was a pious business woman, the second instance of the fruit of his ministry on our continent was the deliverance of a slave girl employed by a strolling band of sorcerers. So wide is the field swept by the beneficence of the gospel, so varied the needs it is capable of meeting. The most respectable and comfortable citizens find their true welfare in its message of grace; the most miserable and oppressed slaves have here their charter of liberty.

3. *Damaris.*[1]—We sometimes hear statements about the failure of St. Paul in Athens. This is a most unjust description of the results of the apostolic visit to that ancient seat of learning. Surely it was no small success to have gained over a member of the ancient court of the Areopagus. But there were other disciples, how many we are not informed. The only one who is named in addition to Dionysius is introduced as "a woman named Damaris." There is no ground for Chrysostom's suggestion that this woman was the wife of Dionysius. On the contrary the way in which she is introduced excludes that idea. It has

[1] *Acts* xvii. 34

been suggested more recently that her name, probably a vulgarism for *damalis*, heifer, suggests a foreign woman, perhaps one of the class of educated *Hetairai* who would more probably be found in the audience than married women, since "it was impossible in Athenian society for a woman of respectable position and family to have any opportunity of hearing Paul."[1]

There is something distinctive in the way in which Damaris and the other Athenian converts are introduced to our notice. It is said that they "clave unto" the apostle, "and believed." This was just after the great speech in which St. Paul first complimented the Athenians on their religiousness, then eloquently described the unknown God in whom we live and move and have our being, and lastly proceeded to expound the specific Christian truth confirmed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That word "resurrection" led to a rude interruption. Some laughed aloud at the idea. The rest seem to have had enough for the present, though they were willing to hear this strange Jew again another time. The assembly broke up in confusion amid mocking laughter and sharp critical remarks. But a few had been seriously affected, and a little group of earnest souls gathered round the apostle. This showed no small amount of independence on their part. At Athens they were in no danger of a violent outbreak of heathen fanaticism. In this centre of dilettante culture people were too frivolous to care to persecute. But the atmosphere was saturated with ridicule; and it required some courage to stand by a preacher of what was regarded as an ignorant superstition.

But the small group of adherents did more than attach themselves to the apostle; they believed his message, believed it in spite of the contempt of the learned and the idle mockery of the populace. This was indeed a triumph of the gospel—a seed of earnest faith taking root even in

[1] Ramsay, *St. Paul, The Traveller, &c.*, p. 252.

frivolous Athens! Amid the many altars and statues, the ancient temples of the gods of Hellas and the recently imported shrines of strange divinities, where people are ready to offer incense to every god, but unable to put their faith in any, this handful of men and women gathered about the Jew teacher has attained to what is indeed a rarity in Athens—a living faith, and among them Damaris has the honour of being the one woman whose faith and influence attract the attention of the historian.

The Athenian converts do not seem to have been sufficiently numerous to have formed a church. But it is noteworthy that in his first epistle to the Corinthians St. Paul, addressing himself to the church in their city, adds "with all that call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, their Lord and ours";[1] and in the second epistle he addresses the church of God which is at Corinth, with "all the saints which are in the whole of Achaia."[2] Thus in both epistles the apostle has in mind certain disciples outside the membership of the Corinthian church; and in the second he names the province. Damaris would be one of these saints of Achaia included in the apostolic greeting. Early in the following century there was a church at Athens — how established we cannot tell, a church that in the reign of Hadrian furnished two famous apologists for the faith. These men of philosophic habit may have come in for a tradition left by Dionysius the Areopagite about whose name a mass of legendary fables has clustered. But Damaris is not to be forgotten. It is a curious fact—surely not without significance—that while the other converts are grouped together without any specification these two alone are named. The mention of Dionysius is accounted for by his previous position in the court of Areopagus; but as no such title belongs to Damaris, it must be for the sake of her subsequent influence that she is singled out.

[1] 1 *Cor.* i. 2. [2] 2 *Cor.* i. 1.

4. *The Ephesian Women.*—The sixteenth chapter of the *Epistle to the Romans* contains far more personal matter than is to be found in any other of St. Paul's epistles, and yet this epistle is addressed to a church that the apostle had never visited. Rome was the metropolis of the world, and Jews were great travellers—the corn trade from Alexandria was almost entirely in their hands. Therefore it is likely enough that a Jew would have kinsmen of his acquaintance in the imperial city. Moreover some of the names that occur in this chapter correspond with names that are to be found on tombs in Rome. Still when all allowance is made for these considerations, and any others that may be urged in the same direction, it remains a very remarkable thing that this chapter of exceptional personal reference should be found in an epistle to a church that the writer had never visited. If there were but one or two names they might be accounted for on the hypothesis that certain friends of the apostle had travelled to Rome. It is the number of salutations, with the exact characteristic descriptions of the persons concerned, that has raised doubts on the subject. Accordingly many have come to the conclusion that the sixteenth chapter of our present *Epistle to the Romans* is really a fragment of some other epistle originally directed to another church. The warning in verse 17 points to a church of which the apostle had direct knowledge, and it is not in harmony with the treatment of the Roman church in the body of the epistle.

If we are to look elsewhere for the destination of this fragment Ephesus seems to be the place. Prisca and Aquila who appear here were last met at Ephesus;[1] and when we next meet with them they are also at Ephesus,[2] as we shall see when we come to consider them more particularly. Then Epænetus is called "the firstfruits of Asia," and Ephesus was the capital of the Roman province entitled "Asia." It would seem that we have here a

[1] *Acts* xviii. 18, 19; 1 *Cor.* xvi. 19. [2] 2 *Tim.* iv. 19.

commendation of Phœbe to the Church of Ephesus. That lady came from Cenchreæ, the port in the isthmus of Corinth from which ships set sail for Ephesus.

Among the salutations which St. Paul sends to those whom we will regard as his Ephesian friends several are directed to women. First we have Prisca, who must be reserved for fuller consideration in the next chapter. Then we meet with a Mary, pleasantly characterised by the addition of the phrase "who bestoweth much labour on you."[1] These salutations are all varied with discriminating reminiscences, and Mary's certificate is one of great honour. It was service that won the richest praise in the apostolic churches. Rank and station went for little; wealth was of no account except in so far as it was given to the common cause, and thus came in as an evidence of self-sacrifice. But service was most highly prized. These churches were alive and active. Each of them was a missionary centre, its members zealous in spreading the good news of the kingdom; and within its borders each was a family, the brothers and sisters bound to care for one another. The law of Christ they were called on to fulfil was to "bear one another's burdens." Now women took their full share in this inspiriting scene of activity. What particular labour Mary was able to bestow in the works of mutual helpfulness carried on at Ephesus is left to our imagination to picture—whether it were in tending the sick, supplying the wants of the poor, caring for the orphans, reclaiming the lapsed, training female disciples, winning new converts—in these and other ways there was abundant opportunity for woman's work in the church of the apostles.

Next we have a salutation to Andronicus and Junias. But the second name could be read "Junia," and the grouping of the two like that of Prisca and Aquila rather suggests that they were husband and wife. Concerning

[1] *Rom.* xvi. 6.

them St. Paul tells four things. *First*, they were his kinsmen, that is to say, Jews. *Second*, they had been fellow-prisoners with him; he does not say when, and we have here an allusion to some imprisonment not recorded in the *Acts*. *Third*, they were "of note among the apostles"; they were of that second order of the apostles, beyond the twelve, the travelling missionaries, and noteworthy in it. *Fourth*, St. Paul adds, "They who also have been in Christ before me." Then these are not to be reckoned among his converts. The title "Apostle" makes it probable that the second of these names as well as the first must stand for a man. Chrysostom, however, assumes that it represents a woman when he exclaims, "And indeed to be apostles at all is a great thing. But to be even among these of note, just consider what a great encomium this is! But these were of note owing to their works, to their achievements. Oh! how great is the devotion of this woman, that she should be even counted worthy of the appellation of apostle!"[1]

A little further on we come on two women, Tryphæna and Tryphosa, apparently sisters. They too are commended for labouring in the Lord—labour again the special point commented on.

But while these two sisters are simply said to have laboured in the Lord, a higher commendation is for one whose name immediately follows—"Persis the *beloved*, which laboured *much* in the Lord." A general favourite she must have been, and deservedly so for her superabounding activity in the church. But note the change of tense. The sisters "labour"; this woman "laboured." Her work is of the past. Either she is aged, or hindered by ill-health, or in some other way compelled to desist. This fact may account for the apostle's very tender way of referring to her. It is hard for those who would gladly work to be compelled to stand aside. Such people have

[1] Quoted in Sanday and Headlam's Commentary on Romans.

a right to receive the utmost consideration from their brethren. But what a new world this is for Greek men and women! There is not a word about those natural charms that are celebrated in the choice of Paris. Human nature is the same all the world over. Beauty is a gift which cannot but win admiration. But here in the church it is not mere personal attractiveness but service that comes to the front; here it is the woman who has served much who is greatly beloved. This is no "Dream of Fair Women." It is the honour roll of self-sacrificing women.

A very touching reference follows next. "Salute Rufus the chosen in the Lord, *and his mother and mine.*" Simon of Cyrene, who was compelled to carry the cross of Jesus, is described by St. Mark as "the father of Alexander and Rufus"[1]—the reverse of the usual Biblical method which identifies a man by a reference to his father. Alexander and Rufus were better known than Simon, probably because they were Christians of the later generation living when the gospel was written. If it is the same Rufus to whom St. Paul here sends a salutation, the mother so touchingly described would be the wife, perhaps now the widow, of the man who carried Christ's cross to Calvary. She must have heard a wonderful story from the lips of her husband! And now her faith in the Crucified has had the effect of enriching and widening her motherliness. She must be an elderly woman for the apostle to regard her as his mother. She is the only woman whom he thus honours. The phrase throws a flood of light back on those months when the apostle was busy tent-making for part of the day while the rest of his time was occupied with discussions in the hall he was thus enabled to hire from one Tyrannus. A motherly heart was devoted to his welfare; motherly hands cared for his wants; motherly tenderness came to his aid in those frequent infirmities to which he was subject. If the apostle had at times so hard a life at Ephesus

[1] *Mark* xv. 21.

that on reflection he could call it a "fight with wild beasts," he had also the incomparable blessing of a woman's care bestowed on him as freely as on her own son.

The last two women mentioned in this long list of salutations are Julia—the name is common among slaves—and the sister of Nereus, about whom nothing more distinctive is said. But it is distinction enough to be named at all in such a roll of honour as this. These two belong to a group that seems to have been a little community in itself, residing perhaps in one quarter of the city and very much thrown together; possibly they held small meetings of their own, for the apostle adds "and all the saints that are with them."

The more we consider this list the more we must be struck with the combination of intense sympathy with keen discrimination in the great apostle. We see the utmost kindness, the warmest appreciation, yet expressed in terms of careful differentiation. This is not the language of flattery. If they had not the true Christian spirit of humility the women who received the more moderate salutations might be inclined to take offence. Tryphæna and Tryphosa, who merely "labour in the Lord," might be jealous of Persis, who is called "the *beloved*," and described as having "laboured *much* in the Lord," while Julia might be still more aggrieved at hearing no reference to her merits, and the many women who were not even named consider themselves unwarrantably slighted. It was a daring thing for the apostle thus to discriminate among his women friends. But he would assume the presence of a magnanimity and a warmth of mutual love in the church that would rise above the miserable selfishness that harbours any such ideas. It cannot be denied that there have been churches that would have been shattered to fragments by the receipt of such a missive as this from an idolised minister. It is to be observed that St. Paul did not send any discriminating salutations to the divided church at Corinth.

5. *The Women at Philippi.*—In the *Epistle to the Philippians* St. Paul does not refer either to Lydia or to the slave girl whom he had rescued during his first visit to the city. But in one passage he has a message for two other women —Euodia and Syntyche, apparently having fallen out, the apostle beseeches them "to be of the same mind in the Lord."[1] An erroneous legend represents these two names as standing for a husband and his wife, and even takes the husband for the converted jailor, thereby implying a painful sequel to the scene in the prison after the earthquake. But both names are feminine. Then it has been suggested that a separate assembly may have been held in the house of each of these women, and that the object of the apostle was to preserve harmony between the two congregations—on what grounds it is hard to guess. The simpler explanation is that they were two members of the same community. If these women were pained at the apostle's reference to their mutual differences it must have been pleasant for them to hear what followed. St. Paul proceeds to request somebody here named Synzygus—possibly meaning Epaphroditus—who he says is true to the meaning of his name as "yoke fellow"—to help these women. He adds that they had laboured with him in the gospel. This is their commendation. It is sometimes to be observed that the most active and useful people are not the easiest to work with. Energy does not necessarily find itself associated with sweetness. It is well to be furnished with the apostle's discriminating sympathy that could correct the faults of temper and at the same time encourage the exercise of energy.

[1] *Phil.* iv. 2.

CHAPTER XVIII

Priscilla—The Woman Missionary

ONE of the oldest churches in Rome, situated on the Aventine hill, and giving his title to a Roman Cardinal, bears the name of St. Prisca. The legendary "Acts of St. Prisca"[1]—which are as late as the tenth century—state that the saint's body was brought from Ostia to the church of "St. Aquila and St. Prisca" on the Aventine, evidently referring to this very building. De Rossi, the archæologist, has suggested that this church stands on the site of the house of Priscilla and Aquila. In the year 1776 a bronze tablet was found in the garden of the church bearing the name C. Marius Pudens Cornelianus. Now, in the legendary "Acts of Pudens," Priscilla is said to be his mother. It is argued that the tablet was found in this garden because here was originally the home where Pudens lived with his parents Aquila and Priscilla. Further, there is also a burial-place at Rome outside the *Porta Salaria*, which is called "the cemetery of Priscilla." That there is some justification for the title has been shown from an examination of the inscriptions. The origin of this cemetery has been traced to the tombs of Acilius, Glabio, and other members of the Acilian *gens*; and it has been discovered that a name for ladies of the Acilian *gens* is Priscilla. For example, there is an inscription which runs thus—

M'ACILIUS V . . .
C.V.
PRISCILLA . . . C

[1] Prisca and Priscilla are used indifferently as the same name.

These various data taken together point to the association of the New Testament Priscilla with Rome. But when we disentangle the legendary matter and separate this from the authentic evidence of inscriptions, we discover that it is only the late and unreliable tradition that definitely connects our Priscilla with these Roman sites, while the inscriptions point to *a* Priscilla, or various women bearing the name without any identification with the New Testament personage. Still the discovery of the name is of some moment, since it is common for particular names to run in families. Accepting these various points on their merits, and making full allowance for the uncertainty of what is merely legendary matter, we still have some curious evidence for the association of the Priscilla of St. Paul's time with Rome, and that goes to confirm what we read in the New Testament.

Turning to our Christian Scriptures we find that there we have two sources of information about Priscilla—the *Acts of the Apostles* and St. Paul's *Epistles*, and they are mutually illustrative and confirmatory the one of the other. We first meet with Priscilla and her husband Aquila at Corinth, where they were found by St. Paul,[1] and the historian traces their lives further back. Aquila was a Jew of Pontus, a remote part of the Roman empire bordering on the Black Sea. Another Aquila, the author of the literal translation of the Old Testament into Greek, was also of Pontus. But there was a Pontian *gens* at Rome in association with which more than one Pontius Aquila has been found.[2] Accordingly it has been suggested that our Aquila may have been a freedman associated with that Roman house. Still, St. Luke says that he had come from Pontus, a statement which, if correct, carries us out of relation to these Roman family names, and leaves us to infer that the Jew instinct for

[1] *Acts* xviii. 1–4.
[2] See Cicero, *Ad. Fam.* x. 33; Suetonius, *Caes.* 78.

travel in the course of trade had led Aquila to leave his native region and settle down in the imperial metropolis. Nothing is said as to the origin of his wife; but the inference drawn from the inscriptions would lead to the conclusion that Priscilla was a native of Rome whom Aquila had met after coming to live in the city. Dr. Hort has suggested that she may have been a member of the Acilian *gens*, in which her name is frequently found. In that case we must think of her as a lady of aristocratic birth. It has been noticed that a certain importance is attached to her by the fact that at two or three places in the New Testament she is named before her husband.[1] Perhaps she was one of those women of rank and position who had become proselytes to Judaism in these times when the conquered people were giving their religion to their victors. On the other hand it has been pointed out as not very probable that a lady of such connections would marry a Jew artisan. It may be that, like so many of the early Christians at Rome who bore the names of the principal families, Priscilla was a freedwoman of the Acilian *gens*.

These two were living at Rome when the tyranny of an imperial edict broke up their home and drove them into exile. "Claudius," says St. Luke, "had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome."[2] This edict is mentioned by Suetonius, the gossipy historian of the Cæsars, who tells us that the reason for it was the disturbances the Jews were continually making at the instigation of "Chrestus."[3] There is much probability in the idea that "Chrestus" is a misspelling of "Christus"—it is met with in some pagan references to Christ; so that the sentence contains the Latin historian's distorted view of some troubles in the *ghetto* concerning the Christ. The only

[1] *Rom.* xvi. 3; 2 *Tim.* iv. 19; and according to some of the best MSS., *Acts* xviii. 26, while Aquila stands first certainly only in *Acts* xviii. 2 and 1 *Cor.* xvi. 19.

[2] *Acts* xviii. 2.

[3] *Judæos impulsore Chresto assidue tumultantes Roma expulit.* Suetonius, *Claud.* 25.

troubles on that ground of which we know anything were occasioned by the advent of the Christian gospel, when the Jews who rejected it were ready to rise in riotous opposition against the preachers of the unacceptable doctrine and their converts. This was the usual consequence wherever St. Paul preached to a Jewish community. No doubt the same thing occurred elsewhere. Here then a faint ray of light falls on Christianity at Rome when it was still ignored by the government or at most contemptuously handled as the last-born turbulent child of the *ghetto*. Even if Aquila had been previously in good circumstances this exile would have thrown all his affairs into confusion. Sufferance being the badge of all their tribe, the Jews of these uncertain times made a practice of bringing up their sons to a trade even if they did not intend to pursue it, so that they might have something to fall back upon if they should chance to fall into adverse circumstances. Therefore we cannot be certain that Aquila had worked for his living at Rome in the trade of tent-making to which he now resorted, and if his wife was of the aristocratic family it is probable that he also was well off till as a Jew he was attacked by this imperial edict. Yet we have no sufficient reason to think this was the case, and it is likely enough that from the first husband and wife were both of the artisan class.

The place selected by them for residence in their exile was Corinth, chosen doubtless as being the most important commercial city in Greece, and one in which there was a good-sized community of Jews.

We cannot say for certain whether Aquila and Priscilla were already Christians when they came to Corinth, or whether they were converted there under the influence of St. Paul. One would think that if they were disciples of the apostle some reference would be made to the fact. But we read nothing of their conversion and baptism. This

rather points to the conclusion that they were members of that Christian community at Rome which must have been in existence at the time, although the origin and early history of it are lost in obscurity. Possibly they were subject to Jewish persecution while at Rome, in some degree the victims of those very disturbances in the *ghetto* which Suetonius tells us were the occasion for Claudius's decree of banishment. If so, their exile was also a deliverance. But on the other hand Aquila is introduced simply as a "Jew," not as a "brother." This is not at all the usual way of mentioning a Hebrew Christian. His connection with the edict concerning the Jews may account for it here, even if he were a Christian. Still the absence of any allusion to his Christianity leads to the inference that he was not yet a convert. The evidence pointing both ways, the question must be left in uncertainty. If, however, the pair were not Christians when they arrived at Corinth, it could not have been long before they were won over to the faith preached by the apostle. The narrative does not allow of the lapse of any considerable amount of time before they appear as the intimate friends of St. Paul.

The apostle found the exiles, apparently soon after their arrival. He visited them, gave them a welcome, and cheered them in their painful position as people about to make a fresh start in life among strangers. Such kind behaviour would go far to incline them to listen favourably to his message, even if they were not already of his Christian faith. The friendship quickly ripened, and St. Paul came to live in the same house with Priscilla and her husband. The obvious reason for doing so was that they might work together, as they were all three of the same craft. It is to be noted here that St. Luke does not confine the tent-making to Aquila, but writes of it as practised also by his wife—"*they* were tent-makers."[1] Priscilla would help at the loom in weaving the goat hair, or with

[1] *Acts* xviii. 3.

her needle in sewing the thick course fabric, and the three would ply their trade together as partners. So intimate was their friendship or so convenient their partnership, that when the apostle left Corinth for Ephesus, Priscilla and Aquila accompanied him.[1] We find them there when St. Paul writes his first epistle to the Corinthians; and the allusion to them in that epistle shows that there was a "church in their house."[2] This phrase, which we meet with in other connections, may refer only to the household, with workpeople and perhaps servants. But more probably it points to some small gathering of Christians, a church within the Church, either an inner circle of intimate friends, or it may be the Christian disciples resident in one locality. Aquila and Priscilla show themselves hospitable and active in Christian service by having such a church in their house.

When the riot in the theatre hastened St. Paul's departure from Ephesus, Priscilla and her husband remained behind, still working at their business which they were getting together after their second removal, and very probably helping to maintain the healthy life of the Ephesian Christians during the absence of their great leader. If, as we have seen to be probable, the 16th chapter to the Romans is a fragment of an epistle addressed to Ephesus, that shows us Priscilla and Aquila still resident in the capital of the province of Asia.[3] Still later they are there when the second epistle to Timothy is sent to that city.[4] The three scattered references to Priscilla and Aquila—in 1 *Corinthians*, *Romans* xvi., and 2 *Timothy*—furnish the strongest reasons for supposing that *Romans* xvi. was intended for Ephesus. Thus we must regard this city as the final halting-place of the exiles.[5]

Now in all these changes and travels Priscilla is the con-

[1] *Acts* xviii. 18.
[2] 1 *Cor.* xvi. 19.
[3] *Rom.* xvi. 3.
[4] 2 *Tim.* iv. 19.
[5] But in support of the view that they returned to Rome, see Lightfoot, *Biblical Essays.*

stant companion of her husband. Moreover, her name is pointedly associated with his in Christian work, and frequently it is mentioned first. We cannot attach much weight to the proposed explanation of the latter fact on the hypothesis that, as a daughter of a good Roman family, Priscilla was of higher social position than the Jew from Pontus, whom in some unaccountable way she had condescended to marry. Would both St. Paul and St. Luke put her first on such grounds? In the free democracy of a Christian Church she was but a sister among brothers and sisters. It is much more likely that her name stands before her husband's because she was the more prominent in the service of the gospel. Certainly she did take an active share in that work. The most brilliant convert to Christianity—with the solitary exception of St. Paul—owed his enlightenment in no small degree to her skilful teaching. Apollos is introduced to us as an Alexandrian Jew both learned in general culture (and that meant much in the city from which he hailed) and mighty in the Scriptures, who came to Ephesus while Priscilla and Aquila were there. Lending himself to Christian influences, he was partially trained in the gospel, but he had not received Christian baptism, and therefore had not identified himself with the Church, when he began to argue with his Jewish brethren and preach about Jesus in the synagogue according to his light. It would have been no easy task to take in hand a man of Apollos's intellectual attainments and independence of character, and lead him on to the views more generally held among the Christians. But Priscilla and Aquila undertook this difficult task and succeeded in it. And here, it is to be observed, Priscilla's name occurs first.[1] We are not merely to understand that she joined her husband in his conferences with Apollos—which would have been remarkable in itself. The pointed way in which her name stands first makes it clear that she

[1] *Acts* xviii. 24–26.

took a leading part in those conferences. With this before us we may venture to go further and risk the conjecture that it was really Priscilla who influenced the scholarly and gifted Alexandrian, while her husband accompanied her in a secondary position.

Priscilla then appears in the Church of the Apostles as an evangelist. Her influence over Apollos would incline us to think that she must have been a woman of intellect. When intellect is given to woman what is to hinder her from consecrating it to the service of Christ? Unhappily a narrow social prejudice has too often compelled this precious talent to be buried. For ages it was supposed that woman's one sphere was the home, and in the home her function was too much that of a family drudge. It was not supposed that she required culture, seeing that her work was to cook her husband's food, make his garments, keep his house in order.

Now it will be an ill day for the world when woman comes to despise her home duties. The home is the most sacred spot on earth, and it is the woman in the heart of it that preserves its sanctity. But the duty of the wife to her home need not be in every case all-absorbing, so that she has no room for any interest beyond the four walls of the house. A woman is not a better help-meet to her husband for scrupulously narrowing down her interests to the things in which, as Christ teaches us, life does not consist, nor is she called to be only his help-meet. That is a most inequitable idea of marriage which would limit the concern of the wife to her household, while her husband is free to engage in a variety of interests without being accused of neglecting his wife and family. Surely it is well when a married woman—especially a gifted Priscilla—can come with the ripeness of matronly experience added to her natural womanly endowments, and give her services in some measure for the good of her fellow-creatures. After all, a woman does not cease to be a member of the

great human family by becoming the mother of one particular family.

And then there are the women who do not marry, and who are proportionately more free for public service. In the middle ages the domestic drudge theory of woman's duty was assiduously inculcated in spite of the poetry of chivalry with which it was glaringly in conflict. Then many women of brains and spirit who desired a career of intellect or influence escaped by avoiding marriage and seeking refuge in a monastery. There, if given to study, they found leisure and freedom for the cultivation of their intellects, if endowed with governing power they rose to places of command in their order. Surely that was a monstrous state of society in which women could only find liberty while preserving their virtue by entering the walls of a convent.[1]

We live in larger days as regards the liberties and duties of women. It is no small part of the missionary progress of our age that is seen in the dedication of earnest, capable Christian women to the spread of the gospel in heathen lands. In the East, where woman is secluded, if she is to be enlightened at all this must be by the coming to her of her sister from the West.

But then it is only just to acknowledge that while the single women who go forth expressly dedicated to Christian work are recognised heralds of the gospel, the wives of missionaries are in most cases not less missionaries themselves. Priscilla was all the more useful a teacher of Christian truth owing to the fact that she was a married woman accompanying her husband. This it was that enabled her to bring her influence to bear on the great convert Apollos.

Though Priscilla may be regarded as the prototype of the woman missionary, it is not to be forgotten that she set about her work in a much more simple way than her sister at the same task to-day. There was no missionary

[1] See Eckenstein, *Women under Monasticism.*

society in the first century; or perhaps we should say, every true and healthy Church was then a missionary society. Priscilla and Aquila were not commissioned by any organised agency. They supported themselves by their tent-making. The modern missionary has an advantage derived from the principle of the division of labour applied to Church affairs when he is supported in the foreign field by the gifts of his brethren who work in their secular avocations at home, because he is thus able to give himself without distraction to the one grand task of his life. But then, on the other hand, the success of Priscilla and Aquila who worked for the gospel while they also supported themselves by their trade—not to mention the wholly exceptional case of St. Paul—shows what may be done by those who are not called to give up their worldly business in order to devote themselves to missionary work. It would be possible for others like these tent-makers to find their mission brought to their very doors.

Lastly, Priscilla's share in the mission she carried on with her husband must not be thought of as simply parallel to his, or superseding his merely because she was the more gifted of the two. They co-operated. Here was the charm of their ministry. It was a truly wedded ministry. They were one in their highest aims. What closer, sweeter, nobler union than this can be imagined? And it was in the blending of their several contributions to the common end that their success was attained. Both took part in conferences with Apollos. If the chief influence was with Priscilla, her husband also had his share. When womanly sympathy and quickness of perception are wedded to manly steadfastness and perseverance we have the ideal missionary. No doubt there is work for celibate missionaries in carrying on dangerous expeditions and holding difficult outposts; but the example of Priscilla and Aquila should show that when the true union can be found a rare power may be developed in the combined labours of the wife with her husband.

CHAPTER XIX

Women in High Places

A STUDY of the women of the New Testament, however cursory, would be deficient without some reference to those of the ruling classes whom we occasionally meet in the course of the history. Most of them are members of the Herod family, and for a full account of their lives the reader may be referred to the volume of the present series that is devoted to that family,[1] a work which makes it the less necessary for us to go into the details here. None of these women can be said to belong to the New Testament excepting in a literary and historical way. From a religious standpoint they are of interest to us chiefly because they furnish a dark and terrible background to the portraits of the pure and kindly women that adorn the pages of the sacred book. We could not have a more effective proof of the enormous contrast between Christian character and the worldly character of the time of Christ and the apostles than that which is supplied by comparing the Marys of the gospels, or Lydia and Phœbe and the other saintly women of the epistles, with those disgraceful female characters whose presence in the courts of the Herods sunk these courts to the lowest depths of infamy. Here on Jewish soil are exact imitations of the scandals that Suetonius narrates as going on in the palace of the Cæsars at Rome. Thus, now and again, happily but just for a moment, the dark shadow of pagan vice falls across the page of the New Testament, and whenever it does so it heightens the impression of the beauty and holiness of the realm where the new-born citizens, both men and women, have learnt to walk in white robes of holiness.

[1] *The Herods*, by Dean Farrar.

1. *Herodias.*[1]—The first of these abandoned women to sully the page of Scripture by her shameful presence there is Herodias. She was the daughter of Aristobulus, who was son to Herod the Great. First she was married to one of her uncles, a disinherited son of Herod the Great, also named Herod. A woman of luscious beauty, she next threw her spell over another of her uncles, Herod Antipas, when he was paying a visit to her husband. This Herod was the king to whom Pilate sent Christ, and who subsequently had the Apostle James beheaded. When he coveted Herodias he had a wife living, the daughter of Aretas, king of Arabia. Thus both were already married. Moreover, they were within the prohibited barriers of consanguinity. But in these dissolute Roman times the half-heathen Herod family made short work of all such obstacles to the attainment of their desires. Antipas permitted his queen to retire to the castle of Machærus, by the Dead Sea, whence she escaped to her father, who thereupon made war upon his faithless son-in-law, and defeated him in battle. Meanwhile the bold Herodias had unblushingly deserted her husband and become the consort of the faithless Herod.

Such was the condition of affairs when the prophet of the wilderness raised his voice against the scandalous wickedness of this trebly illegal union. If John the Baptist was the new Elijah, Herodias was more than equal to Jezebel in the devilry of her revenge.

The one mitigating feature in the life of Herodias is her fidelity to Herod Antipas amid the misfortunes of his later days. When he was dethroned and disgraced she still clung to him and shared with him his exile to Gaul at the remote town of Lugdunum by the foot of the Pyrenees.

2. *Salome.*[2]—One shudders to think that such a woman had a daughter. But knowing her origin we cannot be surprised at the degradation of the poor girl in the dissolute court of which we read in the gospel accounts of the murder of John the Baptist. In her flight from her first husband Herodias had brought their daughter with her, depriving

[1] *Mark* vi. 17-29. [2] *Ibid*

the unhappy man of his child as well as his wife. The scene of feasting and drinking at Herod's birthday feast which the gospels describe is enough to indicate in what sort of a school the girl had been brought up. Yet even there the outrage of decency was amazing when she was allowed to lower herself, princess as she was, to the condition of a professional dancer before a drunken party of lords and magnates. No doubt it was in diaphanous drapery such as is represented in Pompeian frescoes, and with the lascivious gestures that accompanied those disgraceful performances. Cruelty commonly goes with dissoluteness. Brought up as she had been among scenes of vice and in sight and hearing of wickedness enough to crush and kill all the higher feelings, Salome was hardened beforehand into readiness to obey her mother's hideous suggestion. Only a girl thus schooled out of all feminine sympathies could be willing to turn the king's drunken vow, which gave her so large a range of choice, into an excuse for demanding a prophet's head to be served up in mimic mockery, as though it were to be her own and her mother's share of the banquet—an unparalleled mingling of bloodthirsty vengeance with sickening jocularity. Such a scene unsexes any woman. Lady Macbeth would shrink from it with horror. Lucrezia Borgia could not be credited with the loathsome combination of devilry and buffoonery. The dreadful Mænads, the serpent-headed Medusa, those mythological monsters of cruelty, are at least tragic throughout. In the case of the murder of John the Baptist it is the admission of vulgar comedy that adds the finishing touch of vileness to the scene. And yet Salome lived to be a woman and marry, perhaps to bear children and suckle her babes. But her marriages were true to her family history. Her first husband was an uncle, Philip the Tetrarch, a mild and peace-loving man, the solitary member of the Herod family who escaped the family taint of bloodthirsty cruelty. Such a man was not likely long to satisfy the temper of the daughter of Herodias. So she tried her fortunes with a second husband, Aristobulus, the king of Chalcis.

3. *Bernice.*[1]—Two other women of the Herodian family, also of unsavoury memory, whom we meet with in the New Testament, are the daughters of Agrippa I., viz., Bernice and Drusilla. The elder, Bernice, was first married to her uncle Herod, king of Chalcis. Singularly enough, considering what family she came from, Bernice actually remained with her husband till his death. Then she went to live with her own brother Agrippa II., and dark suspicions were circulated as to their relations. Subsequently Bernice was married to Ptolemon of Cilicia; but she soon left him and returned to her brother. After this she became the mistress of Vespasian, and then of his son Titus. This is the woman who accompanied Agrippa, her brother as we have seen, when the king came in state to Cæsarea to pay a visit to Festus the Roman procurator. The scene must have been one of truly oriental magnificence. The military officers were there to receive the visitor with all the honours of royalty which these kinglets under the Roman Empire delighted to obtain, and the magnates of the city were present to flatter both Agrippa their visitor and Festus their master.

It was part of the entertainment and a compliment to the Jewish king to hand over to him a prisoner of his own people, if only for a mock trial. Thus Festus setting Paul before Agrippa followed the example of Pilate when that Roman governor in the same office sent Jesus to Herod. We know how nobly the apostle availed himself of his opportunity, how clearly he told the astounding story of his conversion, and from this went on to set before Agrippa the essence of his gospel message. It was a great occasion, and the inspired apostle rising to it urged his arguments with unwonted force and passion, finally pressing the king with direct questions, which much disconcerted his royal conscience.

Now Bernice was present throughout this memorable scene. She heard the apostle's thrilling account of his conversion; she heard his declaration about Christ; she

[1] *Acts* xxv. 23–xxvi.

heard him speak of the resurrection. What an utterly different world this Jew lived in from that in which she had been brought up! What an entirely new range of ideas he was setting before her! For a moment the golden gates were opened, and she looked into a realm of the very existence of which she had previously had no conception. It was her first introduction to the spiritual world. Like Balaam, she saw the star afar off. Faint and dim must have been her conception of it. We do not know whether it dwelt much with her. Yet she could not easily forget so impressive a scene. We may suppose it not unlikely that in rare quiet moments the memory of this inspired Jew and his startling message would float back into her mind and perhaps stir some slumbering thoughts of better things than she ever saw in her daily life at court.

4. *Drusilla.*[1]—Bernice's younger sister, Drusilla, the second daughter of Agrippa I., had been betrothed in her childhood to a pagan prince named Antiochus Epiphanes; but as this man refused to become a Jew in order to obtain permission to marry her, the compact was broken, and she was given to Azizus, the king of Emesa, that ruler consenting to undergo circumcision as the price of his alliance with the powerful Herod family. Idumeans by birth, and pagans in character, the Herods were always anxious to pose as Jews. So while outraging the moral law of Judaism they were careful to insist on the rite which was recognised as the badge of the race and its religion.

But though he won his bride through a humiliating concession to Jewish customs the king of Emesa was not able to retain her. The family taint was in her blood as in that of all the daughters of this corrupt house. No sooner did Felix, the Roman procurator, set his eyes on her than he coveted this fair queen. Josephus tells us that he obtained the assistance of a Cyprian sorcerer, Simon by name, to win her over, and thus induced her to abandon Azizus and become his wife.[2] This would seem to have been a very superfluous device in the case of a woman of the notorious

[1] *Acts* xxiv. 24–27.

[2] *Ant.* xx. 7, 2.

family from which Drusilla had come; for it did not usually require any very powerful spells of magic to lead the daughters of the Herods into marital unfaithfulness.

Now it is as the wife of Felix that Drusilla meets us in the pages of the New Testament. This is earlier than the interview with Agrippa and Bernice just referred to. For two years Felix kept St. Paul in prison at Cæsarea in the hope that he would tire him out, and so at last force him to seek his liberation by means of a bribe. During all this time Felix would often send for his captive and hold conferences with him. St. Luke significantly informs us that Drusilla the wife of Felix was a Jewess, connecting this statement with the fact that the Roman governor "sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ Jesus." The implied suggestion is that the nationality of the wife of Felix prompted his interest in his prisoner. Perhaps Drusilla was drawn to the apostle at first only from the idle motive of curiosity. The historian does not tell us whether she was ever present at those conferences with her husband. But if her interest in her wonderful fellow-countryman was at the root of them, it is most probable that she was present. We have no information as to any impression they may have made on her. Since her dissolute husband was deeply affected by the apostle's trenchant words on the great moral principles of temperance and righteousness, and alarmed to trembling at the warnings he heard of coming judgment, it can scarcely be that they meant nothing to Drusilla. And yet no permanent effect was left on Felix, and we have no ground for supposing that his wife yielded to the truth in which she had shown some interest.

It is difficult for us to read the stories of these four queens—Herodias and her daughter Salome, and the two sisters Bernice and Drusilla, all of them adulteresses, two of them guilty of foulest murder—and not set them apart from their sex as beneath the nature of womankind. There is no reason to minimise their crimes. We cannot compare them with the poor, miserable, outcast women whom Jesus treated so mercifully, because those women, "sinners" as

they were called, had become penitents, and probably throughout had been crushed down by poverty and ill-usage. These gay queens had no excuses to plead in defence of their shameless careers of crime. And yet there is much in heredity, and more in the influence of example. The royal sinners had never known a pure home life. They had been cradled in wickedness. We regard them as monsters of sin; but we must remember that there was something monstrous about the circumstances with which they had been surrounded from their childhood. It would have been a miracle if ever a virtuous woman had appeared in the family of the Herods.

The dreadful picture of the four dissolute queens may serve to show in lurid colours the desperate need of the world at the time when Jesus came with His new method of righteousness to supersede the old attempts at reformation which had ended in ignominious failure. It was the fulness of the times, in part because then the cup of iniquity was full to overflowing. The world that permitted these daughters of the Herods to flaunt their vices in the highest places was on the brink of utter ruin, and fast perishing of its own rottenness. Then Christ was born, and by degrees His people became the salt of the earth, arresting this fearful corruption, and forming the nucleus of a society of pure-minded, clean-living men and women.

5. *Pilate's Wife.*[1]—One other woman in high position claims our attention. It is in the midst of all the excitement of the trial of Jesus. The weak governor is nearly distracted with conflicting ideas. He is more and more persuaded of the innocence of his prisoner. But the Jews are obstinate. The rulers are determined to have the blood of their victim. The longer Pilate argues with them the hotter their rage grows. He offers the choice of Jesus or Barabbas. They snatch at the offer, but demand Barabbas. Pilate is at his wits' end. Then while he is sitting on his chair of judgment before the tumultuous assembly a message is privately brought to him. It comes from his wife, and it

[1] *Matt.* xxvii. 19.

is urgent. He must have nothing to do with this righteous man. She has had terrible dreams about him. Pilate has gone too far to draw back. But the uncanny message completes his discomfiture. He cannot see his way to acquit the prisoner in face of that howling crowd. Yet he must clear himself of guilt in the matter, or some dreadful doom foreshadowed by that ominous dream may fall upon him. So he formally renounces responsibility by publicly washing his hands. The impotence of the act must not blind us to the fact that it was all the weak man could brace himself to do in response to his wife's message.

Nothing is really known about Pilate's wife beyond the incident narrated in *Matthew*. Tradition, chiefly based on the apocryphal gospel of Nicodemus, has given her the name Claudia Procla, and represented her as a worshipper of the God of Israel; but this has no historical value. It has been pointed out that Augustus had revived an old law forbidding Roman statesmen and legates to take wives with them into the provinces. But under Tiberius the prohibitory mandate had been relaxed again, and now, while it was still preferred that the officials in foreign parts should be celibate, they were allowed to marry, and made responsible for their wives' conduct.[1] Therefore it was now quite according to custom that Pilate's wife should be found with her husband at Jerusalem.

The passage in *Matthew* that gives us all our information about Pilate's wife shows that she knew something of Jesus; for she calls Him "that righteous man." She was more than convinced of His innocence of the crime for which her husband was trying Him. But it was a dream of the early morning that roused Pilate's wife to send the warning message to her husband. Doubtless she had heard how, late on the previous evening, a request had come to the governor for soldiers to be sent to arrest the Galilean Prophet. This was a dreadful piece of business for her husband to be mixed up in. He had done some discreditable things in his official capacity before, but never anything so out-

[1] See Tacitus, *Annal.* iii. 33, 34; iv. 20.

rageously unjust as the condemnation of such a man as Jesus.

The subject takes possession of her mind. She cannot shake it off. It passes into her dreams. There it assumes those forms of horror that crowd into a troubled imagination in the helplessness of sleep. Not once only, but again and again, in different ways, the phantasmagoria of dreamland force the same subject upon her attention. That grave face of the weary man with the earnest, piercing eyes, of which she has caught a glimpse in the streets of Jerusalem, haunts her. There is no escaping it. What a terrible reproach speaks from those truthful eyes! And it is her husband who is to give the word that shall condemn Him, innocent as He is; nay, more than innocent, righteous. Condemn this righteous man to *death.* It is too horrible; it must not be. She starts up from her couch before daylight, hastily summons a servant, and sends her imperative message to the feeble creature who holds the reigns of power in Palestine, and whom she must find it hard to honour as her lord.

It matters not how we account for this dream. We may say it was very natural under the circumstances; or we may hold it to be a message from the world of the unseen. What we call natural, and what we describe as supernatural, are both equally in the hands of God. But doubtless to Pilate, who was sceptical of all the higher truth, as to many another Roman of his day, a dream would seem to have a deeper significance than the greatest utterance of divine wisdom declared in the daylight of reason.

CHAPTER XX

The Mystical Women of the Apocalypse—Woman Symbolical

AMONG the weird scenes of the *Book of the Revelation* we come upon the mystical figures of women who are represented as playing important parts in the terrible drama. Lit up by the lurid flames of judgment, they scarcely appear as human beings. We seem to be in the presence of vast, mythological personages like the Graces and Furies and Mænads of classical antiquity, and quite of another order from the wives and daughters, the mothers and sisters, of our homely world. In some cases it may be that actual women, known to the readers of the book and noteworthy for their prominent character and influence, are brought into the picture in more or less symbolical guise, like Dante's subjects from contemporary history in his *Inferno*, or Michael Angelo's portraits in his great picture of "The Last Judgment." In others, however, these mystical women are but shadowy wraiths suggestive of ideas, or metaphorical types of powers and institutions. The book was addressed to people who were familiar with the materials from which it drew its imagery, and doubtless, therefore, quick to interpret its dark allusions. It is a puzzle to us, because we have lost the key of contemporary knowledge. At best we can but grope our way through the labyrinths of this catacomb of buried ideas by the dim and fitful light of conjecture.

1. *The Woman Jezebel.*[1]—In the *Epistle to Thyatira* the angel of the Church is warned against "the woman Jezebel," and blamed for tolerating her. She calls herself

[1] *Rev.* ii. 20-23.

a prophetess, and she is found teaching Christ's servants. But her teaching is corrupt, encouraging immorality. A time is given her for repentance. If she does not avail herself of it, but continues her evil practices, she will suffer severe punishment, and the people whom she has seduced into her wickedness will die of pestilence.

It is not easy to see whether an actual woman is referred to here, or whether the name is a personification of some corrupting doctrine or of some mischievous party in the Church. There is an ancient manuscript reading that gives "thy wife Jezebel." If this could be adopted, and if the "Angel of the Church" were taken for the bishop, then, it is suggested, Jezebel might be the bishop's wife. Then the passage read in bald literalism would be descriptive of a gross scene of debauchery in the church at Thyatira, carried on under the influence of the depraved wife of the pastor, whom her miserable husband was too weak to restrain. But the variant reading is not considered by most reliable critics to be sufficiently supported to claim a place in the text instead of the usual reading;[1] and the symbolical character of the book throughout, together with the fact that it frequently introduces angels, who in no other instances can be taken for bishops or men at all, compels us to decline that interpretation here.

Going to the opposite extreme from this literalism, a daring view is to take Jezebel for a personification of the Pauline doctrine which St. John is supposed to be vehemently assailing. "Eating things sacrificed to idols" is here associated with the lowest debauchery, as though the two practices were about equally vicious. This could only come from a Jewish way of regarding things. It is an echo of the decree of the Jerusalem Church on the reception of Gentiles.[2] St. Paul, on the other hand, saw no harm in eating food that might have been offered in sacrifice to idols, though he advised consideration for those who thought it an offence, and whom therefore he held to be the weaker

[1] The Revisers only note it in the margin.
[2] *Acts* xv. 29.

brethren.[1] Still it is outrageous to regard this passage in the Apocalypse as an attack on Paulinism. There is not a hint of any allusion to the great Apostle of the Gentiles.

Perhaps on the whole we should incline to the conclusion that the very definite way in which "the woman Jezebel" is described and the ascription of certain effects to her action indicate an actual woman and not the mere personification of a tendency or a party. If we take that view we have a representation of a heathen prophetess teaching in Thyatira; or, inasmuch as she seduces the Christians there, a woman teacher of some incipient gnosticism, antinomian in its tendencies, and even leading to shameful immorality. This Jezebel may have been to St. John what Simon Magus was to St. Peter, but with a more corrupt influence. Like the wife of Ahab, after whom she is mystically named in the Apocalypse, she was a centre of moral corruption. We read in the ancient Hebrew history, "But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to do that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, *whom Jezebel his wife stirred up.*"[2] Such was the heathen prophetess of Thyatira. We must not compare her with the noble, high-minded Hypathia of Alexandria, the charm of whose eloquent lectures in philosophy so provoked the fierce Cyril and his monks. A terribly degrading influence goes with this second Jezebel. Her name is of evil odour. It has been revived more than once as an epithet of opprobrium. John Knox hurled it at Queen Mary, whose light manners, imported from the gay French court, the stern Scotch reformer reckoned a source of corruption for his people. Woman has the gift of influence as one of her principal endowments. When she uses it for good she may be as Beatrice to Dante, the very centre and focus of sanctifying grace; but when she turns it to evil ends, it is the most baleful star of man's sad destiny. Women whose "eyes," as Milton says, "rain influence," have here a spell and a charm often more potent than the obvious authority and the power of brute strength possessed by

[1] 1 *Cor.* viii. [2] 1 *Kings* xxi. 25.

men. Woe to the wretched victims who have been enslaved by it in the person of a Jezebel. Woe, too, to the dreadful Jezebel herself. Perverted in her own nature and a corrupter of others, the milk of human-kindness in her turned to gall, what should be womanly sweetness become a deadly poison—such a woman out-Herods Herod in her cruelty. Theologians discuss the direful nature of Adam's fall; but the more fearful and fateful fall is the fall of Eve.

2. *The locusts from the pit.*[1]—In the gloomy description of the scene following the sounding of his trumpet by the fifth angel after a star has fallen from heaven, the angel receives a key with which he opens the bottomless pit, when with the smoke belched forth as from a furnace there comes out also a swarm of locusts. Infernal locusts they are, commissioned to act quite contrary to locust nature, sparing the vegetation and torturing, but not killing, those men who have not the seal of God on their foreheads. These fiendish locusts sting like scorpions. The description of them suggests might and terror, but among the warlike attributes a very singular feature is inserted—"and they had hair as the hair of women."[2] Arabic poetry comparing the *antennæ* of natural locusts to hair has been pointed to in illustration of this passage. But all the rest of the imagery in it goes beyond the most fanciful description of the insects. These are supernatural locusts, and the mention of women in the description of their hair is the more remarkable because of its contrast with the next clause, which introduces the association of lions, "Their hair is like the hair of women and their teeth are like lion's teeth." The gentleness and grace of womanhood, her beauty, and the softer feminine influence, come in to be opposed by the lion's fangs, typical of savage ferocity. A certain insinuating charm is here suggested, and its presence immensely heightens the effect of the other images, all of which imply power and terror.

The one womanly feature is intended to add to the

[1] *Rev.* ix. 1–12. [2] *Rev.* ix. 8.

horror. The tenderness of womanhood becomes the very crown of the curse of sin when it is degraded into the hideous partnership.

3. *The woman clothed with the sun.*[1]—Happily the images of good in the Apocalypse are as brilliant as those of evil are repellant. One of these begins with the last verse of the eleventh chapter, where we are introduced to the heavenly temple, after the opening of which, followed by thunder, lightning, hail, an earthquake, and the sound of voices, a great wonder appears in heaven. This is the coming of a woman clothed with the sun, having the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She is persecuted by a great red dragon, a monster with seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns on his head. The woman's child is destined to rule all the nations with a rod of iron. To save him from the dragon he is caught up to the throne of God, while his mother flees to the wilderness, to a place prepared by God. There follows a war in heaven, the result of which is that the dragon, who it now appears is the old serpent Satan, is flung out. Banished to these nether regions he again persecutes the woman. But she receives two great eagle wings with which she flees to her place in the wilderness. The serpent attempts to drown her with a flood of water that he pours out from his mouth. Then the earth appears as the woman's champion, opening her mouth and swallowing the flood.

It is far from easy to interpret the imagery of this mystery. Perhaps, as some think, the writer here makes use of a fragment of some earlier Jewish Apocalypse. Whether that be so or not, it is generally agreed that the child who is destined to be a world-wide ruler, and who is divinely delivered from the malignity of Satan, must be the Christ, either originally the Jewish Messiah, or from the first the Christian Messiah, Jesus. Then who is the woman? One interpretation takes her for the Virgin Mary. Even if this be correct she is so greatly idealised, and the story is so different from the actual facts of her

[1] *Rev.* xii.

life, that the real personality is lost in the fantastic picture. But it is more in accordance with the profuse imagery of the book to take the "woman clothed with the sun" as altogether a symbolical figure.

Then may we regard this mystical woman as representing the Church? The difficulty of that interpretation is that then the Church would appear as the mother of the Christ, which is simply impossible if we are thinking of the Christian Institution of which our Lord is in every sense the Founder. But it is quite within the limits of reasonable supposition to take the woman for Israel, the Israel of God, the ancient Jewish Church, from which, in a human and historical way, it may justly be said that the Christ has come. In accepting this view, provisionally and tentatively for lack of a better, we must regard the Jewish Church in its ideal aspect rather than as it was actually seen in the world; and we must limit it to the spiritual Israel, that line of the pious remnant represented of old by the prophets, and later by the devout of the type of Simeon and Anna. There is a real living continuity between this faithful Israel and the Christian Church. The members of the humble, loyal Church of God in the olden times—such as the 7000 in the days of Elijah, who had not bowed the knee to Baal—were continually persecuted, and that to hard straits; nevertheless they were under the sheltering care of God, and cherished, especially with this great providential destiny, that out of them should come the Redeemer of Israel. Outwardly of no account, obscure in the eyes of men, the true Israel of God has to the eye that discerns the spiritual a splendour unsurpassed by any earthly magnificence. This persecuted woman, destined to be the mother of the Christ, is clothed with the sun. She walks in a garment of light, a dazzling celestial radiance shining out from her. She is indeed exalted, and the lesser luminary may be imagined as beneath her feet.

4. *The Scarlet Woman.*[1]—In the visions of horror that follow the angels with the seven vials, the prophet carried

[1] *Rev.* xvii., xviii.

by the Spirit into the wilderness sees a woman arrayed in purple and scarlet and decked with gold and precious stones, while on her head she wears a fillet with her name, after the fashion of abandoned women in ancient times, from which we learn that she is Babylon the great, and of vilest character, and also that she is "a mystery"—that is to say, not, in our modern sense of the word, an inscrutable enigma, but a symbol. Then it is not the geographical Babylon by the Euphrates that is intended. The Scarlet Woman has seven heads and ten horns. The seven heads represent, in the mystery, seven hills, while the ten horns are ten rulers. This and other indications clearly point to Rome, the city of the seven hills. The imperial and commercial splendour of this city is gorgeously described; but at the same time the depth of her depravity is vividly represented. Rome under the Cæsars had become a pit of all the most abominable vices. The shameless Messalina was even about this very time openly degrading the very name of woman in the higher circles. And in the person of her ruler, Nero, Rome had recently become the cruellest persecutor of the Christians. This second Babylon, cruel to the spiritual Israel as old Babylon was cruel to the Jews in bygone ages, drunk with the blood of the saints, is warned of coming divine vengeance. There is no perspective in prophecy. This threat was not fulfilled immediately. More than three centuries were allowed the Scarlet Woman in which to fill up the cup of her iniquities, and then Alaric, the scourge of God, swept down on the doomed city, and slaughter and pillage reduced her to a ruin, the significance of which may be understood by the reader of Augustin's *City of God.*

It is necessary to notice another interpretation of the mystery, as this has long been a favourite idea in some circles of Protestant readers. The Scarlet Woman is identified with the woman clothed with the sun. Both are the Church. In the first case the Church is in her earlier purity and fidelity. Then she is unfaithful, falls, becomes the abomination of Babylon in the apostate

Church of Rome under the Papacy. In favour of this view, it is pointed out how frequently apostacy is described by the Hebrew prophets under the image of adultery. But, on the other hand, it is to be noted that worse is said of the Scarlet Woman, so that her still lower character of abandoned wickedness is scarcely at all if ever ascribed to the apostate Israel in the Old Testament. Moreover it is a fanciful stretch of imagination to suppose that the later historical development would be contemplated by the seer of Patmos in the first century. It is safer to keep to the simpler interpretation that sees in the Scarlet Woman Imperial, not Papal, Rome.

5. *The Lamb's Bride.*[1]—With some sense of relief we may turn, in the last place, from this picture of shameless wickedness to its very opposite, the vision of the spotless bride of the Lamb. The marriage feast of the Lamb is about to be celebrated, and while the cry goes out to summon the guests, the bride appears arrayed in fine linen, bright and pure; and it is expressly explained that this spotless raiment represents "the righteous acts of the saints."[2] Under another image the Lamb's bride becomes the holy city, the New Jerusalem, of which there follows the well-known glowing description. The Lamb's bride, the holy city—what can this be but the community of Christ's people, united to Him as by the close sacred ties of marriage, loved by her Lord and adoring Him, sheltered by His strong protection, gladdened by His Divine presence? From the point of view that our present line of thought furnishes us for approaching this subject, the significant fact is that the Church of Christ appears as a woman. Her relation to the Saviour is the dependent and tenderly guarded relation of the wife to the husband; and at the same time it represents the closest possible union. It suggests to us that there must always be something like a feminine element in faith. The idea that is here set forth in richest imagery appears under a more sober guise in the teaching of St. Paul, who regards the earthly marriage of

[1] *Rev.* xix. 7–9; xxi. 9–xxii. 5. [2] *Rev.* xix. 8.

husband and wife as a mystery, as a symbol of the heavenly union of Christ and His Church.[1] Just in proportion to the warmth of the affection that is here suggested must be the elevation of the spirit of this mystical marriage, if it is to preserve the reverence and lowliness that befit the behaviour of Christians to their Lord. A free and indiscriminate appropriation of the luscious imagery of the Song of Songs to the union of Christ and His people is perilously near endangering those most necessary qualities of Christian devotion. When reading St. Bernard's works and Samuel Rutherford's letters we cannot but be struck with ideas and phrases that would be sickly in any but the saintliest experience. It is safer not to go beyond the austere severity of Scripture in treating this most sacred theme. Still keeping within the lines of the simple phrases of the apostles we have enough to fill our hearts with an amazing vision of Divine condescension that is there set forth in the description of the union of Christ and His Church.

[1] *Eph.* v. 22-33.

CHAPTER XXI

The Treatment of Woman in the New Testament—A Summary.

In the previous chapters we have endeavoured to collect the portraits of the women who are sufficiently described in the New Testament for their individuality to be in any way marked. For the most part we have had to be content with faint hints and shadowy outlines. Still in following these indications we have been able to detect in some cases very evident distinctions of character and temperament. It remains for us before concluding these studies to stand back from the picture and regard the group in its entirety in order to note the position of woman generally in early Christian discipleship and the treatment of her by Jesus Christ and His apostles.

In the first place it is to be observed that the freedom enjoyed by women among the Jews—so strikingly in contrast with the slavery and degradation of women that we usually associate with Oriental manners—which is apparent throughout the Old Testament, is not less evident in the New. Not only do women frequently come before us in domestic scenes, preparing the meals for the household and waiting on the guests, though not as far as we have any indications actually sitting down to table with the men; they also have large scope for individual enterprise. Women of position and property were able to travel in the mixed company of the disciples, apparently without raising any scandal on the ground that they were too much in public or too independent in their actions. Had their conduct been very unusual the critics, who were perpetually on the watch for some occasion of complaint against the new movement, would have been swift to seize on the irregularity.

But they do not seem to have made any objection. Therefore we can scarcely set down this freedom to the influence of Christianity in the emancipation of woman. Moreover, the women that have engaged our attention have none of them stood in the first line of active leadership. Here are no Deborahs inspiring their Baraks, no awful Sibyls, no mighty Amazons. Throughout the New Testament, woman, though often highly honoured and sometimes seen in very beautiful lights, is yet second in position and influence to man. There was no woman Christ; there were no women apostles. None of the leaders of the Church were women. No book of the New Testament was written by a woman. It is doubtful if any women were officials of the churches at all, although perhaps the order of deaconess was established in apostolic times. At all events no New Testament churches were ever presided over by women presbyters or women bishops.

Nevertheless, after making due allowance for these broadly significant facts, we have ample ground for seeing that the New Testament registers a distinct advance in the position of woman. This is not to be recognised so much in the actual position of individual women, or in the honours bestowed on any of them, as in the new spirit and temper which Christianity introduces into society. It is a fact of no little importance that the Incarnation was in a Man. Though Mary was blessed above all women in becoming the mother of the Christ, she was not the Christ, and the step from the human mother to the Divine Son is infinite. Mary was not the Daughter of God in any degree as Jesus was the Son of God. But while this is so, Robertson of Brighton justly pointed out that there was in Jesus something of the woman's nature. This is true in some measure of all men of the finest spiritual character. It strikes us in St. Francis of Assisi; and it may be observed in Robertson himself. These finer woman traits of character are entirely different from the odious weakness named effeminacy, which has not a shadow of true womanliness in it. Robertson won the working men of Brighton largely by his genuine manliness of character; and he was haunted by a strange

feeling that his natural vocation was to be a soldier. Nobody can fairly study the life of Christ and not perceive our Lord's perfect manliness. The courage, the energy, the robustness of moral temperament which we associate with our idea of the true man are to be seen in our Lord's character equally with all other perfections. At the same time the keenness of sympathy, the tenderness of compassion, the mingled refinement of soul and warmth of heart that we ascribe to true womanliness are not less apparent. Woman, quite as much as man, may find in Jesus her pattern and her ideal. Now inasmuch as Christianity is essentially the effluence of the spirit of Jesus, the womanly side of His character is breathed out into the world through His gospel, and womanliness receives in this way a new prominence, a new exaltation, a new dignity.

We may see the same thing from another point of view. Our Lord's teachings bring to the front the finer and gentler virtues, too much ignored both by Paganism and by Judaism. Christian ethics are markedly humane, and humaneness is allied to what we think the womanly grace of character. The active compassion that is introduced by the gospel as almost a new fact in the world finds its most ready reception in the hearts of women. It is not too much to say that woman is the natural home of pity. Then the religion of infinite pity must find a large scope for its manifestation in the sphere of womanhood. At the same time the gentleness and humaneness of Christianity must rebuke and check those brutal customs of unchristian society that forbid the free and healthy development of the womanly element in the community. Christianity is the highest civilising influence the world has ever known, and with civilisation in its noblest moral form woman obtains liberty and protection for the performance of her ministry to the world. Still further, it may be remarked that since the freedom and safety of woman is especially dependent on the maintenance of the virtue of purity, Christ's insistence on this virtue in the extreme form of cleanness of thought as well as in morality of outward

conduct cannot but make largely for the elevation of woman. In these general ways it may be affirmed that the teaching of Jesus and the influence of His life and character have a special significance in regard to women.

Then our Lord's direct treatment of the women who came across His path throws a further light on woman in the New Testament. We have seen that His relation to His own mother had peculiarly painful elements, which even the infinite tenderness of Jesus could not smooth away. That is altogether peculiar, in no sense typical. It is when we see Him among His women disciples that we discover what we may regard as His normal treatment of women. His cures were administered impartially to men and women; His public teaching was open alike to both. Mohametanism will not allow that women have souls, or at all events its method can only be justified on that monstrous supposition, for it makes no provision for the religious teaching of woman. The *Koran* was written solely for men. Judaism cannot be accused of this gross injustice. The Jew's religion is not a perpetual insult to his mother, his sister, his wife. The Hebrew Bible is a book for women as well as men. The first teaching of children in its sacred truths was imparted by their mothers in the home. How beautiful a picture of Jewish family teaching is that we gather from St. Paul's reverent mention of Timothy's early lessons! Jewish they were wholly, and pre-Christian; and yet with all his antagonism to the bondage of the law the apostle could say to his disciple, "From a babe thou hast known the sacred scriptures that are able to make thee wise unto salvation."[1] Still there never was a woman Rabbi among the Jews. No woman would be found among the disciples of Hillel or Gamaliel in the regular instruction of the schools. But, excepting in the case of instruction reserved for the Twelve, from which all other men as well as women were excluded, our Lord's teaching was equally open to both sexes. And full advantage of this freedom of access to the great Teacher was taken by women. Mary, a woman

[1] 2 *Tim.* iii. 15.

sitting at the feet of Jesus, is the typical disciple drinking in His words. Here it is a woman who has chosen "the good part." The conversation by Jacob's well was with a woman. There were women and children among the multitudes whom Jesus fed in the wilderness.

Healing women of their sicknesses, preaching to women in His congregations, and numbering women among His intimate disciples, Jesus consented to be dependent on the gifts of women for the support of Himself and the Twelve. A group of women accompanying Him on His travels, for the purpose of "ministering" to Him, comes next to the apostles, and before any other male disciples. It could not but be that women who were accorded such a position would realise somewhat of the new elevation of womanhood and widening of women's sphere that Jesus Christ was bringing about.

In a very special degree our Lord's treatment of the unhappy class of women who had fallen victims to the selfish vices of men indicates a startlingly new departure. It was customary for religious people to trample these miserable outcasts under foot as hopelessly lost and utterly ruined. For Jesus to show kindness to any of them, and even permit them to approach Him and do Him homage, was regarded as an outrageous breach of propriety. Yet, with a courage that must have astounded His most intimate friends, our Lord maintained His novel attitude unflinchingly. This meant many things. First, it meant justice. The attitude of society to these sorrowful products of its own corruption was hypocritically unfair. They were treated as vermin, while their tempters and destroyers escaped without detection, or even, if detected, had to endure a much less severe social reproach. The same gross injustice has prevailed in all ages, down to our own time, and is found among us to-day, when it is much less excusable, seeing that it is confronted by the teaching and example of Christ.

The passage that most clearly reveals our Lord's perception of the justice of the situation is one that cannot be claimed for certain as an integral portion of the New Testament, that which stands in our Bibles, at the begin-

ning of the eighth chapter of the *Gospel according to St. John*, and tells of the woman taken in adultery. The passage is generally admitted to contain a tradition of probable truth, and a recent suggestion is to the effect that it was written by St. Luke in a second edition of his gospel. In the scene that is here brought before us so vividly two momentous utterances of Christ reveal His way of treating a woman's ruined life. First He bids the man who is without sin among the accusers cast the first stone. A probable variation in the rendering of our Lord's words gives us a terrible suggestion. This is to read, "*the* sin" —"He that is without *the* sin," &c., the man who has preserved his own chastity; then not one of these fierce accusers of the woman could bring his conscience to admit his innocence in this respect!

Jesus here applies His rule about the mote and the beam—not indeed that in this case He would have made light of the woman's offence. But then the custom of society in letting the man off easily and coming down with the severest penalties on the woman was base and false and hateful in His eyes.

Next, seeing that one by one the shamefaced men had crept away in silence till He was left alone with the woman, looking up from the ground, where He had been writing in the dust during the scandalous recital of her story by her coarse-minded accusers, Jesus told her He would not condemn her, and bade her go her way and sin no more. He would not condemn; but He would not condone. That was His position. His mission was not to judge sinners, but to save them from their sin. For condemnation there must be a full and fair trial; and then some things would have to come out which the hasty accusers would be very unwilling to have exposed. Where was this woman's companion in guilt? Not a word had been said of him. It would be monstrous to pass sentence on the weaker offender, even if Jesus had taken it upon Him to act as a judge at all. This cowardly conspiracy of silence by which the guilt of the man is screened, while the

woman is dragged out to shameful exposure and condemned to the lowest humiliation, is an outrage on the first principles of justice, as well as a mean reversal of the root idea of chivalry. Jesus would never sanction it. Under such circumstances therefore He could not think of deepening the misery of an unjustly-treated woman by adding a single harsh word of His own. At the same time, He gave her warning for the future. She was free to go her way, but to *sin no more.*

This agrees with what we read on other occasions of our Lord's treatment of the unhappy victims of man's selfish vice. It was the mistake of His enemies to insinuate that He took a light view of the sin of a woman who had lost the pearl of her virtue. And it is equally a mistake to-day for soft-hearted philanthropists to infer from the example of Christ in this matter that the sin involved is not one of real guilt on the woman's part; though where, as most frequently happens, the poor soul that has been dragged down to the mire is more sinned against than sinning, the guilt of the victim is not the chief point to be considered. Jesus, the very incarnation of holiness, must have felt an instinctive loathing of this evil in all among whom it was found. But His work was to cure, not to condemn. And when He met with penitence He welcomed it. Then the past might be completely forgotten, because the penitent saved by His grace was a new creature. We saw this in the case of the woman who had washed His feet with her tears. Thus in relation to the fallen Jesus appears as the merciful Rescuer, and He leaves to His Church the legacy of His mission in this field of work among the most pitiable of sinners.

Coming in the next place to the treatment of women by the apostles, we meet with another series of questions. The whole situation is changed owing to the springing up of those free social communities of Christians that came to be called Churches. An important point to be determined now was, what position women should have in these novel associations? Seeing that a Church was a centre of activity,

what was to be woman's work in the Church? These questions are still discussed among us; and it is not at all easy to see in what way the New Testament precedent can be our guide in settling them. The principles of the gospel must take precedence over individual instances of the application of those principles in primitive times; because, while the principles are vital and external, the application must be adjusted to local and temporary circumstances, and therefore must vary as those circumstances vary.

The story of the *Acts of the Apostles* does not supply much that is novel in the position and work of women. Mary the mother of Mark exercises her hospitality in having a gathering of the Christians at Jerusalem at her house for prayer.[1] The work of Dorcas, as we have seen, was the simplest and most retiring form of woman's ministry.[2] Later in the history, however, we come across women prophetesses in the family of Philip the evangelist. "This man," says St. Luke, "had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy."[3] Eusebius confuses this Philip with the apostle of the same name, saying, "That Philip the apostle resided in Hierapolis with his two daughters has been already stated," &c.;[4] then he goes on to say that Papias, who was their contemporary, relates marvellous tales that he had derived from them. From the brief notice in *Acts* it would appear that these four daughters of Philip had devoted themselves entirely to the work of the Church, for that reason refusing marriage. This seems to be the first instance in Christian history of celibacy in the service of the Church, and here it cannot be affirmed with certainty that so much is meant by the historian's language. Before long we meet with virgins forming a recognised order, but this is more than we have any right to affirm concerning Philip's daughters. Certainly it would be a great anachronism to think of them as under irrevocable vows like the nuns of later ages. We must travel many centuries before we meet with anything of the kind.

The special function of these four daughters of Philip

[1] *Acts* xii. 12. [2] Chap. xv. [3] *Acts* xxi. 9. [4] *Eccl. Hist.* iii. 39.

was prophesying. The historian does not give us any specimen of their inspired utterances. But thinking of them after the model of what we read of elsewhere we need not picture to ourselves the startling appearance of four weird Sibyls. Their function would be to exhort their fellow Christians. They would be what we in modern language call "Preachers." Whether they preached to their own Church, and visited various Churches, after the manner set forth in *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, or confined their ministration to people of their own sex, we have no means of ascertaining. That they were preaching women in some sense St. Luke's words plainly declare. The prophets in the early Church were not necessarily people gifted with second sight or the faculty of foreseeing the future. Prophesying is the regular New Testament word for inspired utterance in the Church. In the case of Philip's daughters we meet with young women on whom this gift has been bestowed and who are free to exercise it. A century later in Phrygia—the very region where Eusebius, apparently obtaining his information from their contemporary Papias, tells us Philip's daughters had lived—Montanus attempting a revival of primitive Christianity, made it his chief aim to bring back the neglected exercise of prophecy; and with him were associated two prophetesses, Priscilla and Maximilla. Others followed, much to the scandal of the respectable Church officials of the day. It is true there was some grotesque extravagance in the prophesying of the Montanists. Perhaps there was some also in that of the Christians of apostolic times. No record of it has been preserved for us, but we must not credit all their contemporaries in the Churches with the large wise ideas of their great leaders the apostles. At all events it is not unreasonable to suppose that some tradition of the work of the four virgins at Hierapolis may have encouraged Montanus in his daring innovations, or rather his bold attempt to revive the already almost forgotten past.

And now we of the later times, may we not see in the case of Philip's daughters some precedent for a larger

woman's ministry in our own day? If Mrs. Poyser, in *Adam Bede*, had known and understood her Bible better she would not have attempted to explain Dinah Morris's preaching by saying that she had "a maggot in her brain"; for she would have recognised that her niece was following the example of Philip's daughters. And if people who object to women speaking and taking part in public life to-day would but prefer knowledge to prejudice, perhaps they too would be less hasty in condemning the brave and gifted women who venture, often with great self-sacrifice, to follow a New Testament precedent. Surely if God has inspired the minds of women with true and wise thoughts, and endowed them with faculties of utterance, He cannot desire them to bury their talents out of deference to conventional notions of propriety. If a woman, sometimes almost indecorously underclad in what is called "evening dress," may stand up on a platform to sing before a mixed audience of men and women for their entertainment without anybody objecting, is it not a little hard for her sister, who is gravely concerned with some question of public welfare, and able to speak to profit about it, to be blamed when she appears in public for not confining herself to "women's sphere"? We are the slaves of custom. When it becomes usual for the women who are called to that work to speak in public, it will be seen to be no more scandalous than it is at present for others to sing in public. Meanwhile, who shall estimate our loss while these gifts of prophecy are suppressed? How many Philip's daughters may there be among us whose prophetic fires are being smothered and quenched? If the mothers in Israel would tell us what they have come to know of the deep things of God in their rich experience, are there not some of us who would receive their message as a precious prophecy, a rich revelation from heaven?

But now we are confronted with St. Paul's well-known utterances about the place of women in the Church. These have been most unfairly handled from two opposite points of view. Some have found in them an absolute apostolic

mandate, forbidding women to speak in public; others have taken them as a sign of St. Paul's fallibility, and perhaps an evidence that the apostle was a bitter misogynist. It is true that he wrote, "Let the women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak," &c.[1] But a little earlier in the very same epistle, in which these words occur, we read directions concerning women who prophesy—"For every woman praying or prophesying with her head unveiled dishonoureth her head."[2] Are we to think that the apostle contradicts himself in passages so closely following one on the other in the same document? Did he change his mind while writing? If so, how could he allow the earlier passage to stand unerased? If not, then how could he give directions about the attire of women when praying and speaking in public just before forbidding them to speak at all in public? There must be some other explanation.

Now it is to be noticed that in the later passage the apostle does not use the word "prophesy," which he employs when referring to the public utterances of women in the Church. The women are to keep silence, because it is not permitted them to *speak*. It is conversational speech that is here referred to, not the more deliberate solemn utterance that goes under the name of prophecy. This is brought out more clearly by the sentence following the injunction against speaking, where the apostle proceeds to say that if the women would learn anything they should ask their own husbands at home. This can have nothing to do with prophesying, because it was not for the purpose of learning that anybody prophesied. In exercising the solemn gift a man took upon him to instruct or enlighten his brethren. Talking with a view of learning, not teaching, can only be inquiring, disputing, objecting; and the idea seems to be some sort of interruption of the teaching or prophesying that is going on in the Church. St. Paul holds that it is not seemly for women thus to talk—he might almost say "to chatter"—in the church. If there

[1] 1 *Cor.* xiv. 34. [2] xi. 5.

is anything that does not commend itself to them, let them wait till the public service is over, and then raise the point in the privacy of the home with their husbands. We have to think of a very primitive state of affairs for this direction to be necessary, a condition in which nothing like our regular set services were held. All is simple and open. There are no forms of worship. The assembly is more like a family than a solemn meeting. Each contributes what it is given him to say for the general edification. But while this is so, interruptions, questions, objections on the part of some of the women, come to be too freely allowed. These must be suppressed.

To deduce from this prohibition of disorderly conversation a rule that no woman is ever to appear as a speaker on a platform in a regular and orderly way is to misconceive the situation and confuse things that are entirely different.

But now quite apart from this particular direction of St. Paul's, designed to meet a special and temporary condition in the Church at Corinth, we must remember that the whole constitution of society has changed since the apostolic times. A freedom that would not be wise in Syria or Greece in the days of the Cæsars might prove to be not at all inappropriate in England or America nearly two thousand years later. At Corinth in particular, to which place these directions were sent, the apostle might well be anxious for Christian women to maintain some reserve. This city was famous for the cult of Aphrodite, and maintained an establishment of a thousand priestesses devoted to the service of the goddess with foul rites—virtually an attempt to acclimatise the worship of the Phœnician Astartè.[1]

And then the education of woman which is quite of recent days necessarily modifies the whole problem of the sphere of womanhood. So long as women were to a great extent kept in a state of ignorance, they could not be expected to discharge the functions that seem naturally to fall to the lot of the enlightened and cultivated of the present day. That women should be permitted to serve on School Boards

[1] See Edwards, *Com. on* 1 *Cor.*, page xiii.

and as guardians of the poor, in positions that give scope for the employment of feminine tact and wise motherly sympathy, seems more right and reasonable than that these offices should be entirely reserved for men, when we consider that they involve administration of the affairs of women and children. There is nothing in the New Testament to forbid this. On the contrary, the spirit of the gospel should lead us to encourage it.

On the other hand, it cannot be denied that in his treatment of the mutual relations of husbands and wives St. Paul assigns the supreme authority to the husband,[1] and he is closely followed by the first Epistle of St. Peter.[2] Some will raise the question here as to how far the regulations are oriental and of temporary service. Where there is perfect love in a true marriage no thought on the question will trouble the harmony of wedded life. But where this is not realised, and where brutal husbands are found playing the tyrant, the larger principles of Christianity come in, requiring justice and kindness, and forbidding this degraded orientalism.

Irrational and unjust restrictions on the liberty of women must be resisted in the name of Christianity. Still the most modern ideas cannot destroy nature. The distinction of the sexes must remain. Woman is not man, and as she differs from man in nature so she must also differ in function. It is unnatural to demand that women shall do all that men do. Let us remember that however much its scope may be enlarged her work must be womanly. The circle of her influence may be widened with advantage from the home to the parish, from the parish to the nation; but still it must remain a circle of womanly service wherein the graces of sisterhood or motherhood may flourish and shed abroad their beneficent influence.

[1] *Eph.* v. 22–24. [2] 1 *Pet.* iii. 1–6.

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